PC ZONE

IS THIS THE BEST GAME EVER?

HALF-LIFE 2
12-PAGE REVIEW!

ROME TOTAL WAR REVIEW AND DEMO!

EXCLUSIVE!
HANDS-ON AND PLAYABLE DEMO!

MEDAL OF HONOR PACIFIC ASSAULT

TINY COMPO: What's the name of Half-Life 2's engine?

From Sports Interactive, the creators of the Championship Manager® series, comes the next step in the evolution of management simulations – Football Manager 2005.

With over 10 years of football management gaming experience spent developing a games engine and database second to none, no-one offers a greater depth of knowledge into the real world of the beautiful game than the team behind Football Manager 2005.

TOTAL TACTICAL CONTROL:

Heard of total football? Well this is total control. Sports Interactive have ramped up the scope of on-pitch management further than ever before, putting you in complete control of your team's creative freedom, width and tempo. Innovative slider bars now maximise the accuracy of your input, putting you in charge of the finest details. Shape your team and issue instructions to each and every player, ensuring they perform to the standards their pay packets demand.

MASTER THE MEDIA SPOTLIGHT:

Wage psychological war against rivals via media manipulation and mind games. Crack under the pressure and your empire will start to crumble: the players' respect will disintegrate along with their performances, prospective star signings won't want to play for you and the support of the fans will be lost. The board will be asking questions... will you have the answers?

UNPARALLELED CHOICE & DEPTH:

PSV? Italy? Accrington Stanley? With more than 5,000 teams from over 50 countries to work with, you'll have more choice than ever. Each player boasts more than 100 attributes, including "preferred moves" that have star players flaunting the skills that made them famous. Sports Interactive has had a 2,500-strong global research team massing stats on a quarter of a million players and staff - no footy management game has ever been so complete.

BUILT FOR PACE AND LOOKS:

Sports Interactive's celebrated data engine has been optimised to enable background calculations to be made whilst you make your important managerial decisions. The game runs faster than Sports Interactive's previous work and boasts a new intuitive user interface and simplified, customisable search functions to make your life easier. Football Manager 2005 allows you ultimate control with the minimum of stress.

If you know football, if you love football, then you'll love Football Manager 2005. The game created by football fans, for football fans.

SEGA
www.sega.co.uk

FOOTBALL MANAGER 2005

KNOW THE SCORE

THE FIRST AND BEST FOR PC GAMES

HALF-LIFE 2 P60

Is this the best game ever made?

It's Here!

Cause for celebration this month. A few weeks back we got a call from Valve with news that *it* was finally finished. Would we care to review it? Oh go on then, twist our arms...

And then the nerves started to kick in. What if Valve had cocked it up? After all, *Half-Life 2* was supposed to have been finished last year, and since then we've been regaled with stories of stolen code, umpteen delays and legal battles, plus the Internet has been awash with bizarre conspiracy theories. And then it was here. And OMFG. If you want to know more, turn to page 60 now and ingest the 12-page review of the game that's going to change your life.

And as well as a degree of personal satisfaction that I haven't spent the last year-and-a-half hyping a turd, it's great news for the PC. What a lot of people fail to realise is that the PC is as cyclical as any of the consoles. Evolution on the PC is driven through a combination of cutting-edge graphics technology and a group of elite developers with the money, talent and ever-increasing vision to take games to the next level. The 2004 holy triumvirate of *Doom 3* (graphics), *Rome: Total War* (epic scale) and *Half-Life 2* (narrative and immersion) all show what's possible, and it's up to developers everywhere to match and try to better them in the future.

Of course, I appreciate that a lot of games aren't going to get anywhere near – so as you're whooping it up in City 17 in the near future, spare a thought for the beleaguered developer weeping into his Pot Noodle on the sidewalk. And if you are one of those developers, don't despair. We've set up a special helpline on page 162 to get you through this difficult period. Because we care...

Dave Woods
Editor

COVER DISCS P150 →

■ **THREE EXCLUSIVE DEMOS...**
Medal Of Honor: Pacific Assault, Call Of Duty: United Offensive and *Sonic Heroes*. Plus *Rome: Total War, Nexus: The Jupiter Incident* and a hellish host of *Doom 3* mods!

■ **DVD EXCLUSIVES**
Demos of *Silent Hill 4: The Room* and *Richards Burns Rally*, and a free trial of *Neocron 2:*. Plus mods, movies and much, much more!

"*Rome: Total War simply oozes quality from every pore*"

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www.menofvalorgame.com

Experience the Real Vietnam War—from Jungle-Based Ambushes to Intense Urban Firefights

Pick Your Tour of Duty. Single-Player Campaign or Multiplayer on PC and via Xbox *Live* and System Link

13 Action-Packed Combat Missions Spanning Four Authentic Operations

FIRST Look!

LEGO STAR WARS

Hold that thought! This game might actually surprise you...

■ **SMILING PLASTIC TOY** Will Porter

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

■ It's actually looking really good. Honest
■ A Lego recreation of Episodes I-III
■ *Star Wars* hasn't lost its appeal
■ Everything is made of Lego – even flowers!

> "Some adorable animation and impressive saber-twirling is making grown men melt"

A MONTH or so ago, on an evening much like this, five ageing, cynical and bitter members of the games industry were discussing the current gaming scene. "Rubbish," said one. "Bollocks," said another. "Not like in my day," added a predictable third. After a collective sigh, I, a mere pup in their presence, piped up. "Has anyone seen *Lego Star Wars* yet?" Fists slammed on tables, beer splashed on sleeves and murmurs of joy were heard throughout the pub. The message was clear. "Yes. Yes, we have seen *Lego Star Wars*. And don't you know that it's quite, quite brilliant?"

Star Wars games are patchy, and Lego games are even patchier, yet somehow the two (combined with some adorable animation and some impressive saber-twirling) have created something that's making grown men melt.

Lego Star Wars is set to so much better than the *Phantom Menace* game.

You don't even need Lego building instructions. The force is *that* strong.

Essentially a topdown-cum-3D arcade break 'em up, *Lego Star Wars* has one or two players leaping in and out of the action from the first three movies – leaping, dodging and performing simple combos on legions of adorable little battle droids and cutesey-pie Dark Lords.

You start off controlling either Anakin or Qui-Gon Jin aboard the Trade Federation ship at the start of *The Phantom Menace*, and then unlock four further characters as you play through the movies. Force usage is impressively translated as the ability to take a pile of casually strewn Lego bricks and construct them into bridges and handy *Star Wars*-related items. What's more, there are also set to be levels devoted to hurling pod-racers, speeders and Naboo fighters around playsets from our favourite galaxy far, far away.

You may remain sceptical until you actually see the game in motion – that much I know. But as soon as you see the way that droids shatter into their component bricks and the way that starships break into suitable Lego chunks, you'll be sold in a matter of par-secs.

Due for a release just before we're inevitably disappointed and/or inevitably overjoyed with *Revenge Of The Sith*, one thing you can certainly bank on is the fact that the dinky painted-on expressions will make you fall in love with *Star Wars* all over again. That and the fact that the Lego-Padme and Lego-Anakin love scenes may actually be bearable this time. **PCZ**

When 900 years you reach, look as plastic you will not. Hmmm?

Clone Troopers have never been so cute and ickle.

The shroud of the yellow-faced side has fallen. Begun the Lego War has.

STAMP OF APPROVAL
If you look extremely closely, you'll notice that these fellows have the Lego trademark stamped on them as if they were real Lego. Not exactly what the Danish creators of the toy probably had in mind all those years ago, but cool nonetheless.

MASTER AND PADAWAN
Two-player hi-jinks should ensure some superb *Goldenaxe*-style gaming, with the second player able to jump in and out of the game in true arcade fashion. Retro is where it's at.

PUSH THINGS FORWARD
Among your Lego force abilities are nifty tactics like pushing enemies over, flicking distant switches and assuming control of the various droids and aliens you meet. You can also control Jar Jar, although you won't be able to make him jump off a cliff onto Lego spikes.

SHIMMERY FLOOR
For a game that's pretty much come out of nowhere, *Lego Star Wars* boasts some really nice graphical touches. This reflective floor not withstanding.

TODDLERS SHOULD AVOID
A really nice touch, and the only thing that made the original *Phantom Menace* game even slightly playable, is the way that droids fall apart as you swipe at them. Here, lumps of plastic fly everywhere – making you feel pretty satisfied with your Jedi powers.

LITTLE LEGO THINGS
When you destroy scenery, these little Lego nob-lets cascade everywhere in a fashion similar to the omnipresence of Every Flavour Beans in *Harry Potter* games. You can spend these on your character's abilities as the game progresses.

BULLETIN

FUTURE BOY

■ **NEWS WRITER** Will Porter

▲ Yup, the next generation of gaming just turned up. He wears glasses, got an A* at GCSE physics and has trouble articulating himself at social gatherings. He's Gordon Freeman, and the fact that at the time of writing my PC is packed with preloaded Steam-fresh code that I can't unlock (no matter how hard I stare at it), is driving me insane.

So, while I've been twiddling my fingers, I've been considering what other greatness could be coming our way. When I was on my holidays, I got drunkenly talking to a guy who swore blind that he was developing a piece of PC kit for an extremely well-known manufacturer. He claimed this kit is capable of running *Doom 3*, and is made up of a screen that you stick two inches from your eyes, a keyboard that's split in half, a laser device that tracks your finger movement instead of a mouse, and a belt that you keep your graphics cards and processor in.

Obviously, I'm aware that I'm not living in *Back To The Future Part II*, but it gets you thinking about what's in the pipeline. If there isn't anyone currently working on a top secret first-person *Star Wars* game in which you can manipulate *everything* around you with the power of the Force (or, indeed, the Source), then I'm going to go round George Lucas's house and crap in his garden shed until I've persuaded him otherwise.

And, *Jurassic Park* has been out since when, 1994? Please tell me that *someone, somewhere* is making a game that has you lost on a dinosaur island with a big gun? Please? How about just a game where you can shoot dinosaurs that doesn't have 'Turok' in the title? I don't ask for much…

▼

GORDON FREEMAN: BEHIND THE CROWBAR

VALVE REVEALS ALL IN *RAISING THE BAR* – A BOOK DEVOTED TO THE HISTORY OF *HALF-LIFE*

WE'RE WELL AWARE that this month you didn't start reading our mag from back to front. By now you've read the *Half-Life 2* review, ogled the score and have become a puddle of fevered anticipation. Well, now you can bask in the glow of Gordon even more, because one lucky writer was given unparalleled access to the creation of *Half-Life 2* and has had his findings published in a quite beautiful coffee table accompaniment to the game of the century.

"Most of the books that I've seen about games or developers have been one of two types: a biography that comprises a lot of text, or a concept art book of one specific game," explained Doug Lombardi, Valve's head spokes-bod, when we questioned him.

"We decided to blur the lines a bit and offer over 380 pages of text and imagery chronicling everything from the first days of the development of the original *Half-Life*, all the way through to today. So, in addition to many chapters on *HL2*, the book goes into a fair amount of detail on the history of the company, *Half-Life, Counter-Strike, Team Fortress* and *Day Of Defeat*."

The author, David Hodgson was one of the first to play through the game. He interviewed all the team members and had unrestricted access to its art archive – meaning that there are around 1,000 bits of (mostly unseen) artwork adorning the book's 383 glossy pages – half of which come directly from *HL2* and the others from Valve's rich back catalogue.

But how about the murkier parts of Gordon's past, like the delay and the theft? "Obviously, that presented a serious and unexpected set of challenges for everyone on the team," says Lombardi. "It is part of the game's history, so to tell the whole story we felt some discussion of that should be included." So frank discussion of the

leak can be expected, along with all manner of things that were cut from the actual games, and the gut-wrenching work that went into creating City 17.

Obviously we're several times more excited about the game than the book, but it's fitting testament to the oncoming legacy of *Half-Life 2* that a glorified 'making of' book has got us so enthralled. It's due out just before the game hits, and will set you back the royal asking price of £19.99. Unless you win one of our copies that is.

WIN ONE OF FIVE COPIES OF GORDON'S BIOG!

To win a copy of *Raising The Bar*, stick the answer to this teaser onto a postcard:

Which of these isn't a *Half-Life* character?
A: Dr Eli Vance
B: Adrian Shepherd
C: Jeff Freemanstein

Send it to: Book Compo, *PC ZONE*, Future Publishing, 99 Baker Street, London, W1U 6FP.

WIN BY TXT!

Alternatively, to enter the competition by text, send **PCZHALFLIFE** to 83125, with your answer (a, b, or c), plus your full name and address.

All text entries must be received by November 10. Messages will cost 50p plus your standard operator text messaging charge. For full terms and conditions see page 7.
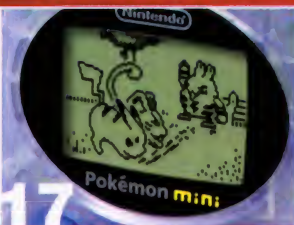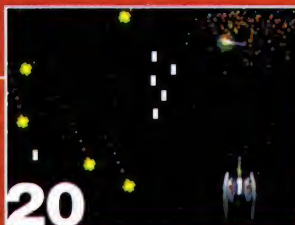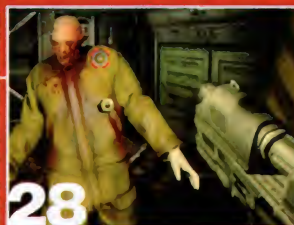
Tricks Of The Mind

EXCLUSIVE SHOTS AND INFO ON *SECOND SIGHT*'S PC INCARNATION.
TELEKINETIC ACTIVITY HAS NEVER BEEN SO MUCH FUN

Less time-splitting, and more mind-controlling.

The set-up is quite console-y.

'Uri Geller: The Game'.

You can't see me.

FROM FREE RADICAL comes the PC release of a game that's been much lauded on all three of our gamepad peers. *Second Sight* is a third-person stealth shooter with a fair few knobs on.

Primary knobs are the psychic powers that your man John Vattic (until recently the comatose subject of hideous surgical experimentation) has at his disposal, as well as his array of 13 weapons. Telekinetic powers enable you to move objects around the place

and throw guards into pits. Convincing enemies that you're not there and creating hefty and destructive Psi-blasts are all on the cards too.

Add to this a narrative structure that has you playing in both the past and the present (with your actions in the past directly affecting your future path), and you've got the template for a pretty innovative actioner. From the depths of the asylum you wake up in to the icy wastes of Siberia, it comes off as

a mix between *The Suffering* and *Jedi Academy* with a strong emphasis on gunplay. No new PC features are planned (we're not getting any special treatment), but you probably knew that already.

- ■ **Publisher:** Codemasters
- ■ **Developer:** Free Radical
- ■ **ETA:** November
- ■ **Website:** www.codemasters.co.uk/
  secondsight/

BIOWARE BOUNTY

UNREAL 3.0 ENGINE CONFIRMED FOR UNTITLED BIOWARE RELEASE,
WHILE DEVELOPER INTERVIEW HINTS AT *JADE EMPIRE* ON PC

Unreal 3.0: it's pretty.

THEY'RE BUSY BOYS over at BioWare HQ – what with *Dragon Age* and *Jade Empire* on the brew. But, to add to this already hefty workload of impending greatness, the news has struck that it's harnessed the powers of the mighty Unreal 3.0 engine.

No firm details yet, other than a gush of developer excitement, but we can expect to see the staple BioWare RPG elements fused with the stunning visuals, nifty physics and incredible dynamic effects of the engine that's so jaw-dropping that we put it on our cover a few months back. We can barely imagine what dank, mist-shrouded dungeons can be created

with this tech, let alone how incredible the NPCs will look. We're excited – very excited.

Meanwhile, the guys from sanqualis.com got an interesting quote from BioWare's joint CEO Raymond A. Muzyka, who claimed that the company was certainly interested in creating *Jade Empire* (the stunning-looking Xbox martial arts RPG) for the PC. Although he hastened to add that nothing could be confirmed or denied, he did state that Microsoft shared its interest, even if so far absolutely nothing has been officially announced on the subject. Would be nice, though.
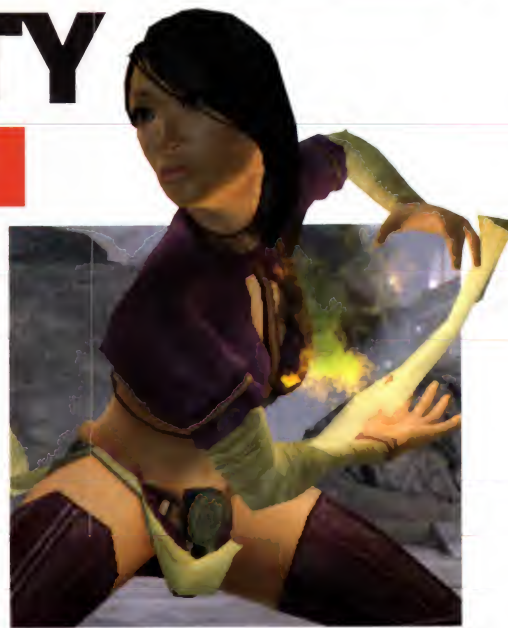
Might *Jade Empire* hit the PC some day?

SEX BOMBS
SPECIAL REPORT

Pavel Barter delves into the Japanese phenomenon of bishoujo, and discovers that PC gaming isn't all demons and frags. There are 'naked anime women' as well

DO YOU LIKE Horny Bunnies? Don't worry, unless you're the owner of a successful rabbit farm that's a question you needn't ever ponder. Not unless you've spent hard-earned yen on the Japanese dating sim of the same name. This hugely successful PC game, now joined by *Horny Bunnies 2*, stars a wine waiter and a harem of wide-eyed anime girls. Each lass has her own fetish and it's your job to take your pick, pursue your quarry, and participate in carnal delights armed with your mouse, some pleasure beads and a raging libido.

Waiters? Bunnies? Pleasure beads? Holy Mother Mary, Joseph and Little Lamb, they never taught me about this in videogame class. Welcome to the weird and raunchy world of bishoujo, an oddity here in the West, but as common as pie and chips for the Japanese. The titles trip off your tongue with filthy top-shelf abandon: *Private Nurse*, *Virgin Roster*, *Secret Wives Club*, *I'm Gonna Serve You*, *Virgin Roster*, *Creamy Angel Vol. 3*. If we weren't so intrigued we'd feel extremely dirty…

EASTERN EYE-FUL
Known commonly as pasokon bishoujo gemu (PC pretty girl games), this is no flash in the pan phenomenon; neither is it a genre solely favoured by angry loners. Bishoujo games, with origins tracing back to the early 1980s, reportedly account for around 20 per cent of all software sold in Japan, and there's a knee-trembling 50 titles released every month. Popular releases and sequels often herald around-the-block queues in Tokyo. Furthermore, they're popular among girls. That's right – girls.

"Some of my favourite bishoujo games of all time are *Eve: Burst Error*, *The Maid's Story*, *True Love*, *Desire*, *Gloria*, and *Kana – Little Sister*," says one female fan from Rhode Island, US, who goes under the nickname Valkyrie. "I'm currently studying Japanese so that some day perhaps I can work as a translator for these games."

Most bishoujo take the form of interactive novels, with different endings and six to eight hours of playing time for each path, although the occasional RPG title rears its doe-eyed head. As for the genres on offer, take your pick. There's horror (*Nocturnal Illusion*, *DiviDead*), romance (*Snow Drop*, *Season Of The Sakura*), simulation (*Maid's Story*, *True Love*), wacky comedy (*X-Change*, *Amy's

Fantasies), even hardcore fetish (*Water Closet*). Uniting all is refined anime artwork and, naturally, sex.

BUSINESSMAN'S DELIGHT
While bishoujo has become part of Japan's mainstream firmament, it's still considered digital porn in the West, an underground secret whispered in hushed tones by beardy types in macs. Peter Payne of US bishoujo importers Peach Princess begs to differ. "Well, I think most fans of bishoujo games don't even think

of them as 'porn' at all. Really, the games are about interacting with the perfect female – more than anything, a girl so perfect she can only exist in digital form inside a game. Much like anime in general, fans like the games because of the uniquely Japanese stories, with cultural elements and a thrill that can't be found in mainstream games."

He continues: "The stories are fascinating – it's quite common to get caught up emotionally in a good game as you explore this ending or that, when

you finally get that character you've had your eye on to accept your advances and say yes."

The first PC bishoujo game was released in April 1982. KOEI's simple adventure ditty, *Night Life*, was followed by a number of '80s hits like *Tenshitachi no gogo* (*Angels' Afternoon*), most of which took the form of strip mahjong and yakyuken (scissors, paper, stone) games. These were lawless times for the industry and the genre's predilection towards alarmingly young girls

Some scary women from *Phantom Of Inferno*. With guns.

culminated in a lawsuit taken against 1986's infamous *177*.

Debates in Japanese parliament over the negative influence of erotic games led to *Saori X-Shitei* (*Saori X-rated*) being taken off the shelves in 1991. The next year the industry agreed to regulate itself, using a mosaic to blur out private parts, adding 18-certificate labels to the covers, and vowing to avoid schoolgirl content. Given anime's love of giggling 16-year-olds, the latter proved a tough challenge.

SEEDY CD
Toward the late 1990s, bishoujo finally grew up. With the introduction of Windows 98 and the proliferation of CD-ROM technology, low-budget designers could finally achieve the dreamlike Manga animations so succulently crafted in movies like *Akira* and *Ghost In The Shell*. Full soundtracks and voice acting now accompanied the on-screen drama. Games like *To Heart* and *Kanon* began winning awards and critics' hearts. Here were titles with mature themes and vivid characters, where the erotic content was merely a side dish to the main course of romantic tearjerking.

As bishoujo was ported from PC for console audiences, transformed into TV anime series and generated warehouses of merchandise, so it began to infiltrate Japanese popular culture. Yet, for some reason, it never truly charmed the West. Peach Princess, which un-censors bishoujo images for English-speaking countries, admits that the genre is destined to remain cultish for the foreseeable future.

"I've worked hard to license and translate these games for many years, and I believe the biggest reason why they haven't become more mainstream are ideas about 'family values' on the part of game retailers," says Peter Payne. "While independent comic shops often stock our titles, most larger software chains won't consider carrying an adult game like the ones we sell, perhaps fearing some backlash by so-called 'moral' people. This is very different from Japan, where there are stores that stock nothing but b-games, and almost every computer store has at least 20 per cent of its floor space dedicated to dating sims."

DODGY CONTENT
Bishoujo is likely to remain a contentious subject, if not for the fact that it has a dark side. Hentai (meaning 'abnormal' or 'perverted' sex) games take a step beyond hardcore eroticism and venture into questionable themes like bondage,

I preferred Teddy Ruxpin to be honest...

That was a nasty tumble. You OK?

Crikey. You don't get this in *Half-Life*.

"In Japan, every computer store has at least 20 per cent of its floor space dedicated to dating sims"

Cynthia found Jeff's elbow remarkably attractive.

molestation and incest. In *Zetsubou*, you assume the role of a criminal rapist stalking your prey on the streets. *Itazura3*, meanwhile, is a 'molester simulation' in which you can grope up to 18 girls. Hmm… Bishoujo fans suggest that, morally, sexual violence in games is no different to physical violence. After all, it's not real, is it? Ladies and gentlemen, we've come a long, long way since *Pong*.

Ultimately, bishoujo appears strange to us because it hails from a different culture and the closest to an erotic date sim released in Europe was *Singles: Flirt Up Your Life* (which was rubbish). Like J-Pop, anime and manga, PC bishoujo games are a succinctly Japanese phenomenon. Fans will argue that what they play is not pornography, in the same way that anime movies are not cartoons. Measuring Japanese adult games by a Western yardstick is impossible, even if on an international level, Horny Bunnies are certainly quite appealing. **PCZ**

TIT FOR TAT

JAPAN'S ADULT PC GAME CULTURE IS ACCOMPANIED BY WAREHOUSES OF PRODUCT TIE-INS

WALL SCROLLS
Delicately hang bishoujo gals from your wall. This one's from *Snow Drop*, a tale of sweet romance and dirty bedroom antics on a quiet mountain retreat.

BOOKS
How To Draw Pretty Girls is a collection of tutorials and exercises on how to craft your own bishoujo babes. Drawing manuals of this kind are commonplace in Tokyo bookstores.

FRIDGE MAGNETS
Sailor Moon is one of the biggest bishoujo hits in Japan at the moment. The game-turned-TV series has its own shokugan (snack toys), photobooks, figures… Even fridge magnets.

PIN-UPS
Can't get enough of those big-eyed, bishoujo chicks? Stick 'em up on your wall! Poster books are all over the Far East, providing a range of lovely ladies – for decorative purposes, of course.

EMULATION ZONE

BREAKING NEWS FROM THE WORLD OF EMULATION, WITH RETRO REANIMATOR *STUART CAMPBELL*

DON'T... POKE... ME...

EMU ZONE HAS remarked more than once on the difficulty of finding previously untouched things to replicate as emulation enters its second decade. However, the hard-working emu scene is not easily discouraged, and this month sees the debut of the virtual version of one of the gaming world's odder curios. The Pokémon Mini, released by

Nintendo as recently as 2002, was the world's tiniest handheld game console with interchangeable cartridges. Running a handful of mostly *Pokemon*-related carts the size of postage stamps, the console resembled Sony's Japan-only PocketStation or the Dreamcast's VMU memory card, but was more powerful then either – and unlike the VMU, didn't exhaust its batteries in 25 minutes. It was capable of hosting some pretty decent little games, in a resolution comparable to the original mono Game Boy. Impressively, it even packed a 'rumble' function.

But anyway – the point, of course, is that there's now no need to lug a bulky, heavy Pokémon Mini around with you if you fancy some action on *Pokémon Mini*

Party, *Shock Tetris* or the indescribable *Zany Cards*. All you need is a PC approximately 300 times the size of the handheld device itself and a copy of PokéMiniDream, the world's first Pokémon Mini emulator.

The first release is impressively complete, running most of the machine's slim catalogue of titles complete with

"Tragically, the authors have failed to bring the 'rumble' effect across to PC"

sound effects. Tragically, the authors have failed to bring the 'rumble' effect across to the PC, leaving Emu Zone unable to award the emulator a score greater than 29.4 out of 35.6. We're really disappointed at not being able to watch the PC judder its way across the floor like a gigantic mobile phone or an inexplicably vibrating fridge. A shame, but some things should be kept sacred – don't you think?

LINKS

pokeme.shizzle.it/ – Team PokéMé homepage with emulator and homebrew ROMs

EMU ARCHIVE AT WWW.EXCELLENT CONTENT.COM/ EMUZONE

Who could ever forget *Sodateyasan Mini*?

Small, but perfectly formed.

WHAT IS EMULATION?

By installing an emulator, you can run games that were programmed for different platforms – such as coin-ops – in their original form. The games come in the form of a ROM (Read Only Memory) that you load into the emulator to run. There are legal issues though, and unless you own the original game, it's often against the law to download a ROM. For that reason, we can't give you links to ROMs, though we can give you links to the emulators themselves.

EMULATION OF THE MONTH

SCOOBY DOO (SPECTRUM, 1986/2004)

We love it when the world panders to our every whim. We've got the best stalkerish readers, who note down everything Emu Zone says in a notebook and pore over it in the small hours of the morning, looking for hidden 'KILL' messages.

The proof? In issue 135, we covered the DOS-only 'enhanced' Spectrum emulator Spec256, and bemoaned its refusal to run on modern Windows PCs. Racing to obey the mighty diktats of Emu Zone, the emulation scene has responded in fine form, specifically the form of the inventively punctuated

EmuZWin. This long-standing Speccy emu recently received an upgrade which incorporated the functionality of Spec256, meaning all the enhanced 256-colour versions of Spectrum games previously released can now be enjoyed by all PC owners.

Still more excitingly, alert coders decided to mark the new EmuZWin by converting a new clutch of games to the Spec256 format, including Elite's 1986 platformer *Scooby Doo* – a game with an interesting story attached to it.

The licence was originally supposed to be used on a spectacular-looking

Dragon's Lair-type adventure, but after months of advertising the project was abandoned and a poorly reviewed 2D platform game swiftly knocked up instead by a different developer. Now however, the 256-colour conversion really brings the game out of its shell. In monochrome it was all but unplayable, but the vastly improved clarity of the extra colour reveals a fast, compelling, all-action game reminiscent of a sort of hyper-wired version of Irem's classic *Kung-Fu Master* coin-op. The port is still slightly glitchy in some of the later levels, but hopefully by the time you read this it'll be all brushed up and shiny – and most of you are probably too wussy to get off level one anyway. With or without the aid of 'Scooby Snacks'.

LINKS

bonanzas.rinet.ru/apps/EmuZWin_Eng.htm – EmuZWin homepage
www.arjun.150m.com/ZX256games.html – 256-colour games
www.emulatronia.com/emusdaqui/ spec256/index-eng.htm – more 256-colour games

Scooby before: camouflaged.

Scooby after: exhibitionist.

THE MAN WHO KNOWS

TV'S Dominik Diamond is to make a **sensational** return to the **shameful** world of gaming television. The former **Gamesmaster** host is prepared to **turn his back** on occasional slots on **Richard & Judy** in order to front **When Games Attack**, a new show for **Bravo**, the channel for men too cheap to pay for real pornography. The non-dour Scot, a former **drinking partner** of **PC ZONE**, snorted: "People have been talking about it on the Internet saying it's the 'son of *Gamesmaster*', but it's a lot funnier than that. It's so good, I'm soiling myself now just talking about it." Executive producer **Richard Wilcox** chuckled: "A lot of people have very fond memories of *Gamesmaster* and so much of that is down to Dominik. Viewers love him. They love his wit, his mischievousness. He didn't just make people watch videogames on TV for the first time, he gave games a credible voice and face, whilst also pulling in an audience that didn't give a damn about *Sonic* or *Mario*. He did for games on TV what Jeremy Clarkson did for cars, though I'm sure he won't like me saying that. It's just great that the champ's back."

Failed **Big Breakfast** presenter **Kelly Brook** is to appear in **Need For Speed Underground 2.** Brook – described by EA as one of the UK's hottest actresses – will play the challenging role of **Nikki**, a complex character with **violent tendencies** who is lured into the rebellious world of **illegal** street racing. Entirely of her own volition, Brook gushed: "It's amazing to see yourself transformed into a videogame character. EA did a great job making my character Nikki look like I do. I'm very excited to be a part of *Need For Speed Underground 2* and I can't believe how realistic videogames have become – the sense of speed and graphics are so good it's almost scary."

The so-called **Manhunt** murder case has been closed, with the motive being recorded as **robbery.** This fact singularly failed to make the front page of **The Daily Mail,** which previously responded with a call to **'BAN THESE EVIL GAMES'.** An expert said: "Dickheads."

> "People are saying it's the son of *Gamesmaster*, but it's a lot funnier than that. It's so good, I'm soiling myself now just talking about it"

ROUND-UP
HERDING FASCINATING NUGGETS OF GAMING INFORMATION INTO AN EASILY DIGESTIBLE PEN

Deadline

LITTLE FRIEND

Perhaps it's because it's such a well-loved film, perhaps because Brian De Palma's incredible direction still haunts someone at VU Games, or perhaps because someone's been playing a little too much *Vice City* – *Scarface* is being turned into a game. Hoorah! We're expecting more of a crime empire-building sim than a game in which you're handcuffed to a curtain rail and watch your best friend being cut in half by a chainsaw... but it could be cool nevertheless.

DEVISE AND CONQUER

Rumours of the development of *Command & Conquer 3* have been bouncing around for months now – what with a shaky-cam photo being leaked and rubbished and general forum banter guessing themselves stupid. The latest news (well, rumour) is that the game's set to be called *Command & Conquer Tiberian Twilight* – which would make sense in the face of 1999's *C&C 2* which had the sub-heading *Tiberian Sun*. More as we hear it.

GRAND STAND

It's one of the most anticipated games of the moment, and we all knew that we'd have to wait longer than our console counterparts – but now we know how long the thumb-twiddling will be. Autumn 2005 is the time the Rockstar money men are talking about for a PC release of *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*. So if you can withstand the urge to buy a PlayStation 2 for a while, we'll be controlling fat gangsters on BMX bikes next year.

DOOM WITH A VIEW

Karl Urban, the guy who played the Rohan horseman that Gandalf came back with at the battle of Helm's Deep, has been cherry-picked by film bosses to play the Marine in the *Doom* movie. Word has it that the Marine (one John Grimm) will be up against both Hell and the organisation that was responsible for the death of his parents (presumably the UAC). We'd still have preferred The Rock though, mainly because seeing a People's Elbow done on a Cherub would be pretty cool.

Action Stations
ATARI DABBLES IN GEOPOLITICAL WARFARE

THE WORLD IS in peril and it's all the fault of those pesky terrorists. How many times have we heard that story? Well, we're about to hear it again in *Act Of War: Direct Action*, Atari's new RTS, developed by Eugen Systems.

The developer of this near future-based strategy game has employed the services of bestselling US techno-thriller author Dale Brown. "The world is changing to the point where terrifying worldwide events portend a frightening view of the future," explained Brown who has helped create the storyline and backdrop to the game. "*Act Of War* is more than just a realisation of this new world – it shows how continued technological innovation and strong leadership can overcome the spectre of terror in our lives."

Gameplay revolves around the machinations of three military forces. These are the US Army (of course), the Consortium (the obligatory petroleum-hoarding terrorists), and Task Force Talon (the high-techy side). Think *C&C Generals*, with a more advanced engine. But there'll be none of your cheeky Chinese hackers here because Eugen Systems is stressing unprecedented levels of realism in the game, including detailed maps of cities like San Francisco and Washington, with *Republic*-style zoomability. We'll be monitoring the frontlines over the next few months.

- **Publisher:** Atari
- **Developer:** Eugen Systems
- **ETA:** Q1 2005
- **Website:** www.uk.atari.com

The war on terror – direct to your PC.

The game's at a crossroads...

ESCALATION OF VIOLENCE

NEW 25-MAP EXPANSION PACK ARRIVES FOR *JOINT OPERATIONS: TYPHOON RISING* WITH APACHES, TANKS AND DIRT-BIKES

Joint Ops: a sniper's paradise, yet a superbly fun game.

PURVEYOR OF fine online gaming experiences and a veritable haven for all those who have a sniping inclination, *Joint Ops* is set for a 25-map expansion. *Joint Operations: Escalation* will take the familiar template and mix in what (in our opinion) looks like a sprinkling of 'Battlefield: Pixie Dust'.

Players will now be able to make airborne insertions by parachute, while dirt-bikes, tanks, SAM launchers and attack choppers dripping with offensive artillery will also be on offer. There'll also be some new locations (what with the Joint Ops versus Rebel skirmish spreading out of Indonesia and into other Asian climes) and a variety of Airports and Missile Launch facilities in which we can all be riddled with bullets by unseen shootists.

Other, lesser, tweaks include a new brand of ceramic armour, more gun emplacements scattered around bases, and a smattering of new co-op and training missions. *Joint Operations: Escalation* is scheduled for release on November 16 – we'll bring you the review as soon as we can.

- **Publisher:** Novalogic
- **Developer:** Novalogic
- **ETA:** November 16
- **Website:** www.jointopsthegame.com

DAYLIGHT ROBBERY

MEET ANYA ROMONOV – *STOLEN*'S LEATHER-CLAD AND MILDLY ATTRACTIVE CAT-BURGLAR

MENTIONED IN THE same breath as luminaries like *Metal Gear Solid*, *Thief: Deadly Shadows*, *Tomb Raider* and *Prince Of Persia* (mainly because it's an unsubtle mix of all four), ZONE had a fiddle with some early *Stolen* code and can report that there's a solid game lurking here, even if there's still a fair bit of work to go.

We saw a variety of rainy rooftop dashes, walls to cling to, ventilation ducts to crawl through and guards to avoid – from which we can definitely tell that Camden-based Blue 52 has a few neat ideas up its sleeve (even if *Stolen*'s console leanings are more than apparent). The hi-tech gadgetry that Anya has at her disposal is pretty impressive, and all geared towards the fact that she's nigh-on useless in a brawl: air guns that fire guard diverting sound-emitters and motion-tracking pellets, for example, or her Sonic Radar that lets her see through walls.

Come Anya's spring 2005 debut we'll see her lightly treading through museums, prisons and a mountain-top satellite facility – all of which will have her twirling around poles and diving around like that bit in *Entrapment* which stars Catherine Zeta Jones' arse and some laser beams. It's true to say that *Stolen* isn't going to knock Fisher or Garratt from their shrouded pedestals – but we advise you to keep tabs on it nonetheless.

- **Publisher:** Hip Games
- **Developer:** Blue 52
- **ETA:** March 2005
- **Website:** www.blue52.co.uk/

indieZONE

DRAGGING THE WORLD OF UNDERGROUND DEVELOPERS KICKING AND SCREAMING INTO THE LIMELIGHT

ONE OF THE things that's been sadly lost in the games industry's transition from a million bedroom coders to half a dozen global corporations, is the distinct flavour of Britishness in gaming. Dear old Blighty was once a huge creative force, pushing back both the technical and artistic envelopes in a way that US or Japanese developers never seemed able to do. Tragically, all the legendary innovators of the 8-bit and 16-bit eras have now been either marginalised or driven out altogether, and only the indie scene remains as an outlet for the UK's inventive gaming minds.

FREE PLAY
WILD WEST HERO

Skyclad Monkeys
www.geocities.com/wildwesthero2004/

ONLY THE BRITISH could look at the seminal coin-op *Robotron* and decide it's too complicated and intellectual. So in 1983, Spectrum coder Paul Holmes came up with a game that stripped the concept down to its rudiments, leaving only the Zen-like core at the heart of the gameplay. *Wild West Hero* presented just one type of enemy, in ever-increasing numbers, and a little robot dude whose gun fired automatically, leaving nothing for the player to do but enter a trance-like state below conscious thought, and endlessly slaughter the bad guys until being finally overwhelmed.

The game's only problem was that the Speccy's technical limitations rendered later screens unfathomable, as the enemy sprites XORed each other out of existence, leading to the player being unfairly killed by what looked like an empty space. Luckily, an alert historian has solved that problem with this splendid PC remake, almost indistinguishable from the original except with baddies who don't disappear. This is a game you can play without employing your higher brain centres at all, and if you're a competitive gamer seeking that elusive mental place known as 'The Zone' in which most victories are found, then *Wild West Hero* is the best training for finding it that you could ever hope for.

SCORE :30875   30875   HIGH
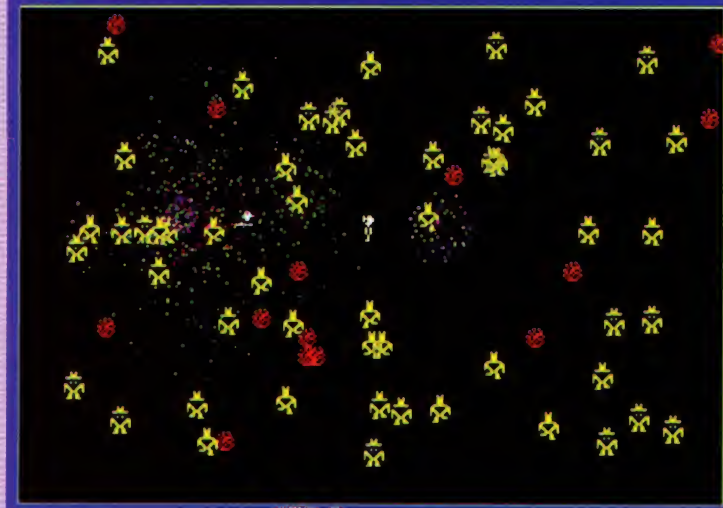
Don't think about them. Destroy them.

So old-skool it'll give you lines if you're late.

DEADEYE

PCZONE Z CLASSIC

■ £5 | Pub: Redpoint | Dev: Redpoint
www.wayoftherodent.com/gd101/bs_deadeye.htm

REQUIRES Anything as powerful as a ZX81 **DESIRES** You'll be able to run it, honest

It's ugly, it's frantic, it's worryingly addictive: it's another *Stuart Campbell* classic...

ALERT READERS may have noticed this column's fondness for old-skool arcade-style shooting games, but even Indie Zone's never gone quite this retro before. *Deadeye* is an unashamed homage to the classic single-screen coin-op shooter from the age of *Galaga*, but in gameplay terms this is no simple remake. As the name suggests, *Deadeye* is a game all about precision – if you blast away like a redneck with a chaingun, you'll get through the game's 50 levels, but you'll end up with a score that will make six-year-old girls point at you and laugh. *Deadeye* rewards players lavishly for two things – not wasting bullets, and taking risks. Wait until the enemies are almost on top of your ship before you zap them, and shoot without missing, and you'll rack up enormous bonuses – as well as other goodies like score multipliers and shields, which can be used to glean even more bonuses, and so on.

As well as being disturbingly addictive in its own right, it's packed with secret things to discover and unlock even if you can't get near the colossal scores on the online high-score page. Only the presentation lets it down – the unadorned, non-resizeable game screen looks a bit forlorn on desktop resolutions higher that 1024x768, and there's no full-screen option – but this is a game with hidden depths that it'll take you weeks to get anywhere near mastering, while still being simple enough not to crush you like a bug if you aren't totally hardcore. At five quid, not giving it a go would be not only stupid, but frankly offensive.

PCZONE VERDICT 90

For the purist, the purest

Ragnar Tornquist
Creative director at Funcom, working on Dreamfall: The Longest Journey

DEVELOPERS' QUESTION TIME

What PC games are you playing at the moment?
Doom 3 and *City Of Heroes* – and I've optimistically preloaded *Half-Life 2*. I'm also waiting in unbridled excitement for *World Of Warcraft* and *EverQuest II*.

What was the last videogame you finished playing?
Finished playing? As in completed? From beginning to end? Um, I can't remember – it's been ages. I usually play games about halfway through before I toss them aside. Most games are too long and too difficult.

What are you most proud of in your career?
The full frontal male nudity in the opening movie of *The Longest Journey*. We slipped that one by everyone. There just aren't enough naked men in games... And I can't believe I just said that.

Who do you most admire in the industry and why?
For being able to get people excited about his games, Peter Molyneux. For creating games that are daring and original, Will Wright. For his cerebral approach to game design, Warren Spector. And for being a brilliant writer, Tim Schafer.

What has the PC contributed most to videogaming?
Deep gameplay, mature stories, complex game worlds – and, perhaps most importantly, online gaming.

What is your company's philosophy?
It may be the biggest cliché in the book, but we're honestly trying to make the best games possible. As a relatively small independent developer competing against publishers with enormous budgets, we have to focus on top-notch content.

What's the best thing about your job?
Working with so many smart and creative people. That's what gets me up in the morning...at the ungodly hour of 7.30.

What's the worst thing about your job?
It doesn't leave enough time to actually play games. And also the food in the cafeteria. It's bloody awful.

What are you working on at the moment?
The days are packed. I'm working on two games – *Dreamfall* and a top secret online game – pulling double directorial duty.

What's the Next Big Thing in PC gaming?
Online distribution. *Half-Life 2* and Steam is the beginning of the end for brick and mortar retailers. It won't be about positioning anymore, just quality and word of mouth.

PLAYING FOR KEEPS

MEDIEVAL MUCK AND HIJINKS ABOUND IN 3D *STRONGHOLD* SEQUEL

STRONGHOLD, THE game that won our hearts back in 2001 when it tactfully told us "it's awfully late sire, don't you think you should be getting to bed?" (during a particularly marathon stint of crenellated strategising), is back.

This time around though, as is the fashion these days, it's all in 3D. What's

Siege combat looks better than anything in *Lord Of The Realms III*.

more, even though its developer is keen to stress that this isn't just *Stronghold* with an added dimension, it's all looking quite lovely. Whether you're watching a Gongfarmer shovelling crap into a cart, rats charging around biting people on the ankles or a falconer sending out his hawks to prey on the rodents, it's clear that this is a game that focuses on more than simple food, resources and weapons. All medieval life is here, from disease to hangings to church on a Sunday.

Castle-building is very much the name of the game, as well as nurturing the chains of connection in your peasant community so that you can grab all the honour and popularity points that you can. If you have sheep, for example, you can have weavers who can create cloth, which can then be delivered to your ladyship. She can then busy herself

making tapestries and pretty dresses to boost your honour when you invite noble dignitaries around for a feast – who'll also be impressed by the number of posh foods that your estate can provide.

So it's all about bigging up your lordship, while nurturing (or, if you choose, oppressing) your serfs. There's also (of course) a fair amount of combat – and we can report that what's on offer here looks several thousand siege engines'-worth better than anything that was on offer in *Lord Of The Realms III*. What the 3D engine brings, for example, is the opportunity to have Errol Flynn-style swordplay on spiral staircases (although rope-dangling and chandelier-swinging will, shamefully, not be included). There will, however, be siege engines, battering rams, boiling oil and an as-yet-unrevealed mode called the Kingmaker Campaign.

The main storyline, meanwhile, focuses on big, ginger Vikings cropping up on his Lordship's turf. In our opinion, it looks like it's going to top its most direct competition *The Settlers: Heritage Of Kings* – perhaps because it's so much more mucky and disease-ridden.

- **Publisher:** Global Star Software
- **Developer:** Firefly Studios
- **ETA:** April 2005
- **Website:** www.fireflyworlds.com

English Heritage won't be happy.

Angry Vikings with wavy hair will provide the plot.

Intuitive chains of production will run your medieval townsfolk, while the Lord and Lady govern all.

Andale! Andale! Arriba!

"LOOK AT IT. Just look at it," murmured the promotions man reverently. "Can you honestly tell me that it doesn't look better than *Far Cry*?" Well… Erm… No, it doesn't. But it does look like a fun Mexico-based shooter that we'll tell our readers to keep an eye on. And it does look a bit like *Far Cry*. And the grass sways about which is quite nice. "Okay then."

El Matador is a third person stealth-shooter with all the bangs and whiz-pops that have now become part of the actioner template: ragdolls, evil-doers standing next to conveniently placed barrels, cars, helicopters, piles of haphazardly stacked boxes and a jungle setting. Developed by Plastic Reality, the men who made *Korea: Forgotten Conflict* (which soon became, ironically enough, a largely forgotten game) the game is set to be a solid enough shooter – even if the second coming of Freeman has raised the bar of expectation higher than any smaller-scale game of this ilk could ever hope to manage.

Then again, the trials and tribulations of a DEA officer whose brother has been murdered and is launched into the murky underworld of South American drug dealing should prove fertile ground for some worthwhile blasting. It isn't going to follow the trails of the *Desperado* films (although they've promised they'll try to crowbar in a guitar case, just for us) but the Mexican setting and the array of drug-dealing villains could well provide a nice change from terrorists, hellspawn and dimension-hopping aliens.

A bit like *Far Cry*. Only not.

No jungles are without rope bridges.

Stop evil van-driving drug dealers.

Well, at least he has better dress sense than Carver.

■ **Publisher:** Cenega
■ **Developer:** Plastic Reality
■ **ETA:** Q3 2005
■ **Website:** www.elmatador.net

GOING FOR GOLD

THE GOLDEN JOYSTICK AWARDS HIT THEIR 22ND YEAR, AND NEED YOUR VOTE TO CROWN THE KING OF PC GAMING

IT'S ALMOST time for the most glorious of all award ceremonies, The Golden Joysticks 2004. On November 5, a leading UK comic on a big stage in a posh hotel will present the most coveted award in UK gaming, given to the PC game that's floated the nation's boat.

That's because, unlike other awards bashes, you decide which game wins. The shortlist has now been announced, and we need you to tell us which of these games deserves the love.

The line-up is as follows: *Doom 3*, *Far Cry*, *Half-Life 2*, *Unreal Tournament 2004*, *Warhammer 40,000: Dawn Of War* and *X2: The Threat*.

Now, clearly you're going to have to wait until you've got your grubby mitts on Gordon before you vote… But don't forget that we need your voice to be heard. You can vote up until a week before the event – which takes place on November 5 – by heading to www.goldenjoystick.co.uk. If you're lucky, you might even get to win a year's worth of free games, in which case you'll be pretty much set up for the 2005 awards as well.

THE GOLDEN JOYSTICK AWARDS 2004

www.goldenjoystick.co.uk – go!

THE GOLDEN JOYSTICK AWARDS '04
ESTABLISHED 1982

GOB SHITE

Is that the game where you're the man and you've got a gun at the bottom of the screen?

Production editor Clare reveals once more that despite her crack abilities on her rubbish Mac game Zookeeper (up to level nine now everyone) her basic FPS recognition is still slightly lacking.

I wouldn't hazard to look too far ahead. I'm definitely going to see through this round of rendering work. I wouldn't make any promises beyond that.

John Carmack, cornerstone of PC gaming, hints that even he has his eyes on retirement. Or perhaps an extended period in space.

The very first thing happening after Half-Life 2 involves much tequila.

Valve spokesman Doug Lombardi reveals that, as you're reading this, he's probably ripped off his tits. Well, they all deserve it.

Got the greatest game idea since *Doom*? Come and put it to the ultimate test – *PC ZONE*'s Search For A Game...

Another month, another game-designing wannabe. The entries are still streaming in, but don't let that stop you sending your own ideas to us. That's exactly what Ben Moxon from Guildford in Surrey did, and now here he is in the spotlight, pitting his idea of god-game cum beat 'em up to our esteemed judging panel. Will they like the idea? Let's find out as we mix Japanese-style RPGs and advanced AI routines in a game described as...

"Black & White with kick-ass kung fu"

Your students learn from your actions, then set out to fend for themselves.

MASTER SENSEI

YOU PLAY the Master Sensei – the greatest martial artist who's ever lived. You run a dojo deep in the forest of a country plagued with monsters. Because of the control you've exerted on your environment, you can't leave your home, so you decide to send a small group of your most promising students to find out why the monsters are taking over.

This gives the opportunity for a story of epic and sweeping grandeur. Although you can control the students as they walk around the country, talking to people and going shopping, you don't control them in a fight. They just kick off against any monsters they meet with whatever skills they happen to have. This means that if they're going to learn to beat different types of monsters, they have to first capture one and bring it back to your dojo. There you can confront it personally in a beat 'em up-style combo fest. Once you have the knack of winning, you teach your students, adapting it for different weapons and skills they have. Their AI copies the techniques you teach when they next fight. You can therefore have very fast and spectacular battles without having to pause for user interaction.

Monsters are captured using traps and stealth, requiring your students to study their patterns in monster-stalking sub-games. As your collection grows, you can work on group tactics, or just put monsters in a pit to fight each other, with bets placed on which one will win.

Combat is handled *Final Fantasy*-style.

Japanese RPGs provide the influence.

WHAT THE JUDGES SAY

"I feel there's two different ideas here that really don't gel. I'm a big fan of the *Master Sensei* idea, but twiddling your thumbs in a garden shed while your students do all the fighting doesn't sound like fun. Then you've just jemmied in a version of *Monster Rancher* or *Pokémon*, which seems a bit incongruous. I feel this would work much better if you ditch the daft monster idea and instead create a world where you can live out your fantasies as a legendary Bruce Lee figure, building up your virtual dojo with weapons, special moves and fanatical followers." **Verdict: MISS!**

"I don't get this at all. You talk about dragging monsters back to fight one-on-one, while your students stand round and learn your behaviour, meaning that next time they meet that particular creature you get 'fast and spectacular battles without the need for user interaction'. Have I missed something? Surely it's the fast and spectacular battles you want to interact with in a game like this? There's room for an epic martial arts-based RPG out there, but don't take all the fun out of the game before you start." **Verdict: MISS!**

"I like the concept and the way in which your students would mimic your fighting talents, but as a whole this game really wouldn't work. You'd just be there cooped up in your little Sensei hut getting bored with the same fighting environment over and over, and isn't it a bit boring just watching AI students fighting monsters without any interaction? Reverse the situation, and have you as the student dragging monsters back for artful fighting tips – that would make a nice game feature. Otherwise, not an effing chance." **Verdict: MISS!**

"Naught for three. Ouch, that had to hurt. Not even the advanced AI of the Sensei can save this one. Bad luck there Ben. Ah well, we'll be back next month with more!"

Send your ideas in no more than 300 words (along with a one-line pitch and any artwork) to 'Search For A Game' at the usual address.

Developing *Black & White* levels of AI is key to making the game feel real.

HUGE CONFLICT: VIETNAM GIVEAWAY!

FIRST PRIZE

- LG 23-inch widescreen LCD TV/monitor
- Limited Edition STORM Military Khaki watch
- *Conflict: Vietnam* PC game

RUNNERS-UP PRIZES

- Two Limited Edition STORM Military Khaki watches with two copies of *Conflict: Vietnam* PC game

CHECK. US. OUT. This month, thanks to the generous bods at SCi, we're giving one lucky reader the opportunity to win a great package of *Conflict: Vietnam* goodies worth over £1,500!

Conflict: Vietnam is the recently released action-packed, chart-topping squad-based shooter from the makers of *Conflict: Desert Storm II*. As a US soldier thrown immediately into the Vietnam War, you have to take a brutal, uncompromising tour of duty through the hot, humid South East Asian tropical forests of Vietnam, completing dangerous missions and hunting out enemy VC.

The winner of the first prize receives a copy of SCi's napalm-bombed third-person shooter, and the following prizes...

- A magnificent LG 23-inch widescreen LCD TV/monitor worth over £1,000!
- A Limited Edition Military Khaki watch made exclusively by prestigious UK company STORM
- Plus we have two runners-up prizes of a copy of *Conflict: Vietnam* and the Limited Edition STORM watch.

For a chance of winning, simply poke your head out from behind cover long enough to answer the question opposite. For full terms and conditions, see p7.

WIN!

FLATRON

RAGMAN
JUNIOR
HOSS
CHERRY

100/9

LG

PC CD-ROM

CONFLICT VIETNAM

16+
www.pegi.info
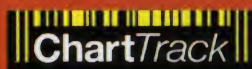
CHARTS

In association with **VIRGIN MEGASTORES**

They pull *The Sims*, you pull *Doom 3*. They send one of yours to the hospital, you send one of theirs to the morgue. That's the charts way

ChartTrack — PCZ TOP 10 — elspa

		TITLE	PUBLISHER	SCORE
1	-	**DOOM 3**	ACTIVISION	90%
2	NEW	CONFLICT: VIETNAM	SCI	75%
3	NEW	SHELLSHOCK: NAM '67	EIDOS	53%
4	▼	CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER: SEASON 03/04	EIDOS	90%
5	▼	THE SIMS: TRIPLE DELUXE	EA	N/A
6	▼	THE SIMS	EA	86%
7	NEW	CODENAME: PANZERS PHASE ONE	CDV	80%
8	▼	CSI: DARK MOTIVES	UBISOFT	60%
9	▼	FAR CRY	UBISOFT	93%
10	NEW	BATTLEFIELD 1942: WWII ANTHOLOGY	EA	N/A
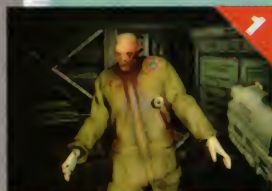
Doom 3 may be sitting atop the charts looking smug, but if you look closer you'll see he's stroking his shotgun and muttering something about bearded men in orange suits. Your time's nearly up Marine – it's been fun, but Freeman wants his throne back.

Four men, lots of guns, some villagers in funny hats and another *Conflict* game for kids to snap up – hardly the reason you own a PC, but an enjoyable blast nevertheless. *Conflict: Vietnam* nestles in the charts at number two. Charlie don't surf etc.

Drugs, prostitutes, guns, swearing and a game that doesn't deserve the disc it's lasered on. They say that sex sells, but this makes it quite clear that hulking piles of marketing-minded shit sells just as much. Charlie don't surf etc.

Before we start *Sims*-bashing again, can we just all sit back and recognise how simply amazing it is that they're still in the charts? It's a triumph of marketing, ingenuity and capitalism. But we still hate it, obviously.

YOUR SHOUT

Have your say at www.pczone.co.uk

I'm amazed so many people went out and bought a technology demo (*Doom 3*). I wonder how many could actually run it at higher than 640x480 res…
RaTang

Doom 3 is out already? Didn't think we'd see that drivel for another few months.
Goattail

Doom 3 enjoyment is directly proportional to the sexiness of your PC – it's been proven by scientists. (I'm a scientist.)
Escaped_Monkey

Virgin megastores — TOP 10

1.	DOOM 3	ACTIVISION
2.	THE SIMS: TRIPLE DELUXE	EA
3.	FAR CRY	UBISOFT
4.	JOINT OPERATIONS: TYPHOON RISING	NOVALOGIC
5.	UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2004	ATARI
6.	CONFLICT: VIETNAM	SCI
7.	D-DAY	DIGITAL JESTERS
8.	SHELLSHOCK: NAM '67	EIDOS
9.	SOLDIERS: HEROES OF WWII	CODEMASTERS
10.	NORTON ANTIVIRUS 2004	SYMANTEC

COMPETITION — Virgin megastores

Win £100 of Virgin vouchers!

PC ZONE and Virgin have teamed up to give you the chance to win 100 shiny pounds-worth of goodies from your local Virgin Megastore. All you have to do to enter is answer the following:

QUESTION:
Which game features a nefarious character called Dr Betruga?

A The Sims: Triple Deluxe **B** Norton Antivirus 2004 **C** Doom 3

Send your answers on a postcard to: *PC ZONE* Chart Compo Issue 148, Future Publishing, 99 Baker Street, London, W1U 6FP. Closing date: November 10 2004

- Please include your name, address, daytime phone number, email address, job title and company name (and age if under 18).
- Please tell us if you do not wish to receive details of further special offers or new products from other companies.
- Please indicate whether you are a current subscriber to *PC ZONE*.

To enter the competition by text: send PCZVIRGIN, to 83125, with your answer (a,b, or c), plus your full name and address.

- All text entries must be received by November 10. Messages will cost 50p plus your standard operator text messaging charge.

For general competition terms and conditions, turn to page 7.

INCOMING!

PC ZONE'S RELEASE SCHEDULE FOR THE NEXT FEW MONTHS. ALL MONTHLY DATES ARE APPROXIMATE AND CORRECT AT THE TIME OF GOING TO PRESS

OCTOBER

KNIGHTS OF HONOR	SUNFLOWERS/EA
LEISURE SUIT LARRY: MAGNA CUM LAUDE	VU GAMES
MEN OF VALOR: VIETNAM	VU GAMES
NEXUS: THE JUPITER INCIDENT	HD INTERACTIVE
OBSCURE	UBISOFT
PACIFIC FIGHTERS	UBISOFT
ROME: TOTAL WAR	ACTIVISION
SHADOW OPS: RED MERCURY	ATARI
SILENT HILL 4: THE ROOM	KONAMI
SNIPER ELITE	MC2
STAR WARS GALAXIES: JUMP TO LIGHTSPEED	ACTIVISION
TOP SPIN	ATARI
TRIBES: VENGEANCE	VU GAMES
VIVISECTOR	BRIGADES

NOVEMBER

ARMIES OF EXIGO	EA
AXIS & ALLIES	ATARI
CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 5	EIDOS
EVERQUEST II	UBISOFT
FLATOUT	EMPIRE
FOOTBALL MANAGER 2005	SEGA
GTR	TBA
HALF-LIFE 2	VU GAMES
THE LORD OF THE RINGS: THE BATTLE FOR MIDDLE-EARTH	EA
MEDAL OF HONOR: PACIFIC ASSAULT	EA
NEED FOR SPEED: UNDERGROUND 2	EA
PAINKILLER: BATTLE OUT OF HELL	DREAMCATCHER
PLAYBOY: THE MANSION	UBISOFT
PRINCE OF PERSIA: WARRIOR WITHIN	UBISOFT
PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 4	KONAMI
ROLLERCOASTER TYCOON 3	ATARI
SID MEIER'S PIRATES!	ATARI
VAMPIRE: THE MASQUERADE – BLOODLINES	ACTIVISION

DECEMBER

KOTOR II: THE SITH LORDS	ACTIVISION

Q1 2005

BROTHERS IN ARMS	UBISOFT
DRAGONSHARD	ATARI
GHOST RECON 2	UBISOFT
IMPERIAL GLORY	EIDOS
LEGO STAR WARS	EIDOS
PARIAH	HIP INTERACTIVE
SETTLERS: HERITAGE OF KINGS	UBISOFT
SPLINTER CELL: CHAOS THEORY	UBISOFT
STOLEN	HIP INTERACTIVE

2005

ADVENT RISING	VU GAMES
BATTLEFIELD 2	EA
BATTLESTATIONS: MIDWAY	SCI
BET ON SOLDIER	DIGITAL JESTERS
BLACK & WHITE 2	EA
COSSACKS II: NAPOLEONIC WAR	CDV
DREAMFALL: THE LONGEST JOURNEY	FUNCOM
DUNGEON SIEGE II	MICROSOFT
EMPIRE EARTH 2	VU GAMES
F.E.A.R.	VU GAMES
GRAND THEFT AUTO: SAN ANDREAS	ROCKSTAR
MIDDLE-EARTH ONLINE	VU GAMES
QUAKE IV	ACTIVISION
STAR WARS: REPUBLIC COMMANDO	ACTIVISION
SWAT 4	VU GAMES
STALKER: SHADOW OF CHERNOBYL	THQ
STARSHIP TROOPERS	EMPIRE
THE MATRIX ONLINE	SEGA/WB
THE MOVIES	ACTIVISION
WARTIME COMMAND: BATTLE FOR EUROPE 1939-45	CODEMASTERS
WORLD OF WARCRAFT	VU GAMES
YOU ARE EMPTY	1C

MISSING IN ACTION
The war's not over until the last game comes home...

DRAGON EMPIRES

Mounting server issues and general risk analysis has seen the end of Codemasters' MMOG. Leaving a grieving community in its wake, it's yet another online experience that's bitten the dust alongside *Warhammer Online*, *Mythica* and *Ultima X Odyssey*. Rest in peace.

- **Publisher:** Codemasters
- **Developer:** Codemasters
- **ETA:** KIA
- **Website:** www.codemasters.co.uk/dragonempires

CALL OF CTHULHU

The 1920s adventure based on the works of HP Lovecraft has hit the skids, and now won't be with us till early next year. It promises a 'dynamic sanity system' that has you undergoing simulated panic attacks and vertigo when you're fending off aliens on high ledges – we're suitably intrigued.

- **Publisher:** Bethesda
- **Developer:** Headfirst Productions
- **ETA:** Q1 2005
- **Website:** www.callofcthulhu.com

SETTLERS: HERITAGE OF KINGS

This one almost got past us, but it seems those medieval Germans have settled into a slot next year. We're far too obsessed with *Half-Life 2* to gnash our teeth and beat the ground too much, although its cutesy-pie visuals and streamlined strategy are likely to make it the best the series has seen so far.

- **Publisher:** Ubisoft
- **Developer:** Blue Byte **ETA:** Q1 2005
- **Website:** www.thesettlers.com

TOP 10 MOST DISAPPOINTING GAME ENDINGS OF RECENT TIMES

1. **MEDAL OF HONOR: ALLIED ASSAULT**
(I'M ON THE TRAIN! YAY! WHAT NOW? OH)

2. **HALF-LIFE: BLUE SHIFT**
(THREE SCIENTISTS IN A RANGE ROVER. HOW EXCITING)

3. **HALF-LIFE**
(IT'S A BABY? THAT TELEPORTS ME TO RUBBISH PLACES?)

4. **FAR CRY**
(WELL HE'S DEAD THEN. ANYTHING ELSE? NOPE)

5. **STAR TREK VOYAGER: ELITE FORCE**
(WORST BOSS EVER. WORST JOKE EVER)

6. **JEDI KNIGHT: JEDI ACADEMY**
(RUBBISH BOSS KILLED. ANTICLIMAX EMBRACED)

7. **BROKEN SWORD: THE SLEEPING DRAGON**
(WHY AM I DODGING FIREBALLS? THIS IS ODD)

8. **DUNGEON SIEGE**
(ALL THAT FOR A PAGE OF WORDS. MERE WORDS?)

9. **TRON 2.0**
(MORE AND MORE AMAZING LEVELS. UNTIL THE ABYSMAL BOSS)

10. **THE SIMS**
(BECAUSE IT CAN NEVER END. EVER)
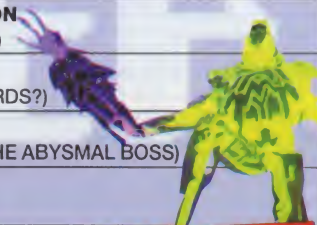
IS THERE A GAMING CHART YOU'D LIKE TO SEE HERE? SEND IT IN AND IF WE PRINT IT, YOU'LL GET A PC ZONE GOODIE BAG!

SOURCE: Regulation Board of Battios and Underwhelm-ment

Play our exclusive demo and shoot faces!

Banzaiiiii... 🔴 ON THE CD 🔵 ON THE DVD

MEDAL OF HONOR: PACIFIC ASSAULT

War in Europe? Ha! That's a schoolgirls' picnic compared to this.
Anthony Holden risks jungle rot to play EA's long-awaited FPS sequel

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER EA
PUBLISHER EA
WEBSITE www.eagames.com
ETA November

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Sequel to the brilliant *Allied Assault*
- Takes the action to the Pacific theatre
- Strong emphasis on characters
- Epic cinematic set-pieces

HERE'S A little remembrance for you, lest we forget: *Medal Of Honor: Allied Assault* was a great game. We wouldn't play it in a fit these days, because it's been thoroughly superseded, but at the time it was truly marvellous – genre-defining, you might say. It kick-started the war-shooter craze that grips us to this day, introducing the celebrated movie-like set-pieces and ramping up the intensity to gut-rumbling levels. Unlike most shooters of the time,

it shifted the emphasis from single-handedly killing everything that moved to keeping your head down and simply surviving – looking out for your buddies, moving from cover to cover, shooting only that which popped its head up inadvisably from a fortified bunker.

Hopefully by now you know the story that ensued. The core of the *Allied Assault* team went off and made *Call Of Duty*, the others stayed behind and

CV 〓A

ELECTRONIC ARTS

EALA is Electronic Arts' major development studio complex in Los Angeles, housing the impressively-large 100-strong *Medal Of Honor: Pacific Assault* team.

2002 *Medal of Honor: Allied Assault* is released, and immediately becomes a PC gaming classic. Soon afterwards, a chunk of the dev team leave to set up Infinity Ward, now responsible for rival WWII FPS franchise *Call Of Duty*.

2002 *Medal Of Honor: Allied Assault – Spearhead* is the first expansion pack from EALA, featuring a host of new weapons and WWII scenarios.

2003 *Medal of Honor: Allied Assault – Breakthrough* is the second add-on pack and centres on the bitter conflicts in North Africa and Italy.

We can see you...

BLOOD BROTHERS

IF IT BLEEDS, WE CAN KILL IT

One of the most common complaints levelled at the *Medal Of Honor* games is that there's never been any blood to speak of. For a series that prides itself on its accurate, detailed portrayal of World War II, this strange squeamishness always seemed odd. *Pacific Assault* has gone at least some way to rectifying matters.

Now, you do at least get a reasonable puff of red ketchup when you riddle someone with lead, and you can also toggle player blood on and off for extra splatter. It's still a very clean version of the horrors of warfare, and a long way from *Soldier Of Fortune II*, but at least it's something.

"Some of the daytime missions are so bright and sunny, you actually think your gamma settings are screwed"

made *Men Of Valor: Vietnam*, and EA was left with a *Medal Of Honor* franchise and nobody to make it. So the company took the sequel in-house, re-imagined the whole series in the Pacific, and started again from scratch.

Now of course, the genre is thoroughly overcrowded. *Call Of Duty*, once the pretender, is now the genre benchmark: if *Medal Of Honor: Pacific Assault* was expecting a hero's welcome, it had better wise up. It's come to market very, very late, and now has a hell of a lot to prove – especially in the wake of the excellent *Call Of Duty: United Offensive* add-on.

CHALLENGE EVERYTHING

After months of expectation, we've received some lovely single-player code for the game, and it's time to answer some of the big questions. What does it bring to the party? Does it do enough to justify its existence? Is it, to put it bluntly, an irrelevance?

To settle the last one straight off – no, it's not irrelevant. In fact, it does a few quite interesting things with the war format, and with the right tweaking in the next month or so, could be a serious contender for your FPS attentions (after you've finished *Half-Life 2* for the second or third time, of course).

However, we'd be lying if we said it was going to be the defining moment the first game was. From what we've seen, *Pacific Assault* is going to have to rely on last-minute polish to match *Call Of Duty*. At present, it just doesn't have the same levels of excitement, intensity or scale.

But don't switch off just yet. The game has a definite charm of its own, and provided you reassess your expectations, there's plenty to look forward to here.

WALKING ON SUNSHINE

For a start, *Pacific Assault* takes a different tack from *Call Of Duty* in a couple of key areas. While the basic gameplay is very similar – deliberately intense, highly scripted recreations of real-life historical battles, with a number of AI chums running at your side – the atmosphere is very different.

Most obviously, you've got the sun-drenched tropical setting. And I mean: soaked. Some of the daytime missions are so bright and sunny, you actually think your gamma settings are screwed.

The developer has created a super-saturated look where the light burns out a lot of the detail and colour from the environment. It's an unusual effect, but striking once you stop fiddling with your monitor settings.

There's also the jungle itself. After the initial excitement of Tarawa Atoll (a shameless revision of *Allied Assault's*

Butlins had really gone downhill.
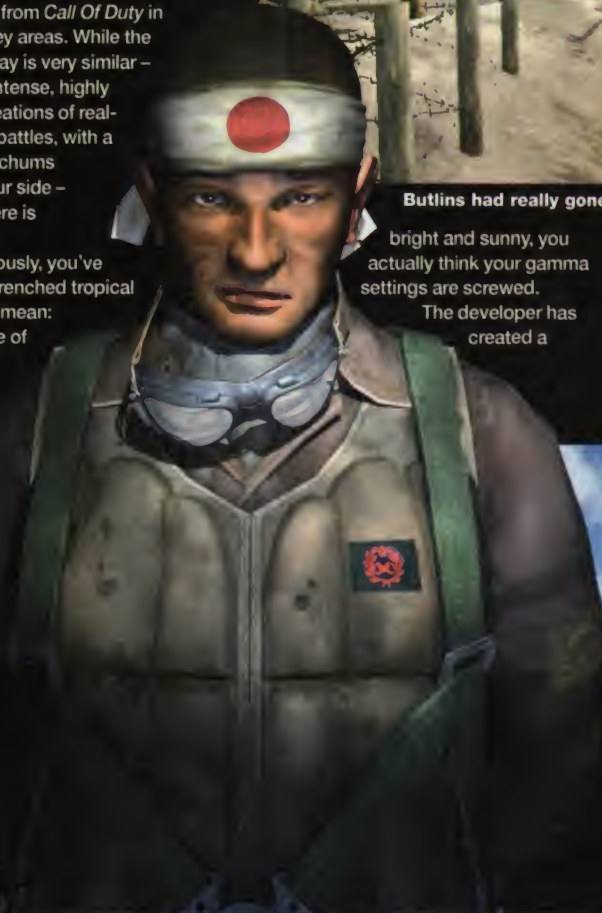
Can *Pacific Assault* outshoot *CoD*?

Press <F> to exchange the Thompson for the Type 100 SMG

42

8 /302

Gotta pick a pocket or two, boys...

Omaha Beach mission) and Pearl Harbour (a short but hurricane-force conflagration), the game settles into a long series of jungle-based skirmishes. Unsurprisingly, the dense greenery has a profound impact on the way the game plays. Simply spotting the enemies through the foliage becomes a difficulty, and considerations such as cover, camouflage and surprise all take on new significance.

GOLDENEYE SYNDROME

There are definitely a few problems here too. For a start, it's far more difficult to create 'walls' in the environment to delimit the play area, often resulting in glaringly obvious foliage corridors. A careless bounding box on a tree or shrub occasionally throws up an invisible wall between you and your target (very frustrating). Worst of all, the whole thing can simply become monotonous.

In its favour, Pacific Assault does manage to keep the tempo up with a

variety of action set-pieces. An ambush in a swamp, a village raid, an escort duty on an airfield. True to formula, you also get the occasional high-paced on-rails section – riding shotgun in a stolen jeep or manning a mounted gun on a boat, for example. Overall though, the jungle theme is a lot less exciting than, say, a war-torn village in occupied France, and the choice of location seems more suited to small-scale clashes than grand Call Of Duty-style affrays. Luckily, the game eventually moves out of the tight confines of the jungle and begins to climb to the levels of bullet-riddled ferocity we've come to expect.

TOMMY BOY

One area where Pacific Assault does top Call Of Duty is in the area of characterisation. One of Call Of Duty's great strengths was that it didn't just represent the US role in the Great War, taking in Russian and British missions in equal measure. The advantage of that

BACK FROM THE DEAD

PACIFIC ASSAULT GIVES YOU A NEAR-DEATH EXPERIENCE

One of the best new features in the game is the Near Death device. Here, when your health reaches zero, you don't immediately die. Instead, the screen fades to black and white, your vision lolls back and one of two things happens. Either your Corpsman comes to your aid and brings you back to life, health fully restored, or a Japanese soldier comes along and brutally executes you. (Or, if no one bothers to take any notice of you, you simply fade away into a gentle sleep.) Whatever happens is largely down to luck, though it also depends on how far you've strayed from your squad and how many enemies you manage to take down with you. Either way, it's probably best avoided.

"It's a real contrast to *Call Of Duty* – where that had an international flavour, *PA* is resolutely American"

approach was variety (and historical veracity), but the weakness was a lack of identifiable characters and ongoing narrative. Here, Pacific Assault pounces, taking an active interest in character and working to build up the central figure of Tommy, the scared yet plucky young marine raider.

It's a real contrast to Call Of Duty. Where that game had an international flavour, Pacific Assault is resolutely American, portraying Tommy as a small-

town boy who just wants to get home to momma's apple pie. Your squad-mates are also fleshed out to some extent in the grainy cut-scenes: the loudmouth leader, the bookish medic, the country bumpkin who's a mean shot with a sniper rifle. Despite the fact that they're oddly indestructible on the battlefield, it works pretty well, creating a real feeling of identity and comradeship.

At the outset, you're the rookie, fresh from a post-Pearl Harbour furlough and a few months' hurried training. You're initially looked on as a liability, the 'rook', and there's a genuine sense of gratification as you prove yourself to the more hardened raiders. Of course, it's manufactured that way, but ignore that fact and it works nicely.

DOCTOR DOCTOR

An even stronger feature of the game is the new 'Corpsman' function. Rather than scattering health packs through the undergrowth, Pacific Assault introduces a corpsman or medic character that you can call on by pressing 'H' (for, er, Help).

It works much the same way as the equivalent character in a class-based multiplayer bout, except that this medic is actually obliged to come and treat you when called upon. Of course, there are some caveats. If you're in the middle of a blazing firefight, the medic may not be able to reach you (likewise if you stray too far from your squad). Your doctor's appointments are also limited in number, so it's not a licence to go on a rampage and then limp back for medical attention (though that's exactly what I did throughout, to my cost).

Stick close to your squad or you might get cut off in the heat of battle.

Talk about a smokin' gun...

Why Don't You?...

GIVE US SOME DEFENCE AGAINST THE BANZAI

I've got plenty of suggestions for *Pacific Assault* (some of which might not be entirely appreciated), but one that I think could be implemented, even at this late stage, is a last-resort defence mechanism against the banzai charge.

At the moment, what happens is this: whenever you get within a certain range of a Japanese soldier, he charges you, bayonet or katana swinging fiercely. Plus, every now and then, a whole bunch of them get desperate and mount a more organised charge, running you down with no regard for their own lives.

Usually, this sees you emptying your rifle into their midst, taking down one or two and then backing off furiously as you attempt to reload, as often as not taking a bayonet in the eye.

What would be great would be some sort of heroic blocking move that, with the right timing, would allow you to deflect the kamikaze strike and give you a few seconds to counterattack. No extra buttons would be required, and it would be immensely cool and satisfying. But I know, I've asked too much already...

To complement this feature, you also have to patch yourself up on occasion. Suffer a serious wound and a loud heartbeat sounds, meaning you have to bandage yourself quick smart or bleed to death. It's an old idea, pioneered in ancient *Quake* mods such as *Action Quake II*, but it still works wonders as a way of adding tension to the proceedings.

Despite these extra keys, however, *Pacific Assault* definitely has a more arcade feel to it than *Call Of Duty*. It's less hardcore, a little more forgiving; it has a touch of the Boys' Own Adventure to it. It's not a criticism – anything that distinguishes the game from its rivals is more than welcome, but if you were hoping for a harrowing trial to match, say, Stalingrad or Kursk from *CoD*, you might be disappointed.

A LITTLE HELP HERE

Unfortunately, in the present build, there are some real concerns to be had. The AI, for a start, is all over the place. It does display some high points, such as the banzai charges of the Japanese troops and the aforementioned Corpsman, but it's also worryingly inadequate in some areas.

One time, I was being stabbed in the back by a Japanese bayonet and my squad-mates just looked on, unconcerned. Occasionally, one of my boys would yell, "they're flanking us", but I'm sorry Jimmy, they really weren't. In fact, they were just floundering around being useless or bobbing up and down rhythmically behind a rock. The fact that headshots don't seem to count for much is also frustrating (and don't give me the 'I was wearing a helmet' line either Mr Samurai – I shot you full in the face).

Other issues include an annoying cursor lag, something a lot of people have been complaining about from the demo. It's a small thing, but there's a perceptible pause between you pressing the mouse button and Tommy pulling the trigger, or indeed between you pressing 'R' and Tommy starting a reload.

Hopefully both of these issues can be addressed before launch, although that November release date is worryingly close.

Thankfully, EA certainly has the resources to achieve a great deal in a short time, and if it can resolve some of these problems it will have a great little war-themed FPS on its hands. And that's not even mentioning the highly promising multiplayer game. I just hope for all our sakes that the game isn't rushed out – that would be to inflict great dishonour on the untarnished *Medal Of Honor* legacy. **PCZ**

"Need... Beer... And crisps..."

How ill-mannered.

Softly softly catchy monkey.

A Football Association meeting in progress.

Another one bites the dust.

The plot thickens...

PARIAH

The best story-based game since *Half-Life*?
Anthony Holden heads to a world beyond *Unreal*

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Digital Extremes
PUBLISHER Hip Interactive
WEBSITE www.pariahgame.com
ETA March 2005

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

■ New single-player FPS from the makers of *Unreal* and *UT* series
■ Huge emphasis on story, character and script
■ Innovative upgradeable weapons
■ New multiplayer game types
■ Mysterious superpowers to be discovered

STORYLINES in games are shit. Not a new observation by any means, but one that's as true today as it was ten years ago. For all the credit we give games like *Sam & Max*, *Knights Of The Old Republic* and *Max Payne 2*, most game plots are wafer-thin excuses for slaughter, daubed on the back of a napkin by a semi-literate, attention-disordered metal fan. If a game's not a rip-off of *Aliens*, it's probably a rip-off of *Neuromancer* or *The Matrix*, with a level of character development slightly less sophisticated than your average porn film.

Which is why it came as such sweet music to our ears when we found out that *Pariah*, the new FPS from *Unreal*-developer Digital Extremes, is all about telling a great story.

"We really want to push the envelope in storytelling," agrees James Schmalz, founder and creative director of the esteemed Canadian codeshop. "I've played too many games, especially in the FPS genre, where the story is like 'ho-hum', and the game's really not that compelling. Even *Doom 3* – an amazing game – is at best a B-movie. We're

The scriptwriters are hiking a *Pariah* film script around Hollywood as we type.

The power of Vaseline Intensive Care, plain for all to see.

BARREL OF LAUGHS

'BEST BARRELS EVER' CLAIMS PROUD DEVELOPER

The first-person shooter genre is full of outdated conventions dating back to the early days of the form – warehouses full of crates, mysteriously roomy air con ducts, chainsaws in space stations and of course, the good ol' exploding barrel. The latter items feature quite heavily in *Pariah*, but rather than making excuses, the lads at Digital Extremes have decided to have a bit of fun with them.

"Every FPS has to have barrels," grins James Schmalz, "but we've tried to take them to the next level. So we've got these barrels full of fuel, and of course you can tip them over, you can blow them up and it's all physics-based; but you can also shoot them and poke a hole in the side. Then, if you push one over, you can roll it around wherever you want, leaving a path of fuel behind. And when you shoot the fuel, this huge wall of flames shoots up."

Seeing a rudimentary version of this trick in action, we can't help thinking of old Looney Tunes episodes. "Exactly," laughs James. "But it's got so many cool gameplay uses. You can create a path of flames, set traps, cut off pursuers and funnel enemies where you want them. It's the ultimate barrel experience." Quite.

Best barrels yet! Allegedly.

"As technology improves, you need better actors and story to deliver a compelling overall experience"

JAMES SCHMALZ CREATIVE DIRECTOR, DIGITAL EXTREMES

putting a lot of effort into making a really interesting story – one where you have an emotional investment in the situation and the characters, and we're trying to do that more so than anyone has done before."

GETTING EMOTIONAL

The game itself is a handsome sci-fi shooter set on a far-future Earth. Like many of its ilk, you've got a selection of vehicles, some big guns, a few enemies and the trusty old Unreal engine humming away beneath it all. The big difference, as far as James is concerned, is that these factors are matched by an equally advanced emotional aspect, something he sees as increasingly critical in today's hi-fidelity game environments.

"With the level of graphical detail, the facial animation and the physics, you need to have a much better storyline that blends in with and matches that level of realism. And if you don't, it's that much more disappointing. As the technology gets better, you need to have the better actors and the story to deliver a compelling overall experience."

It might sound like hype, but Digital Extremes is leaving nothing to chance in its quest for the perfect story, enlisting the help of two Hollywood scriptwriters, spending painstaking hours casting voice-actors and generally laying out a shedload more time and cash than most FPS developers would ever dream of.

"Oh yeah, we're going crazy," enthuses James. "We've done all sorts of research about how stories are made and what makes a great story. We're on the fifth revision of the script right now, and we still want to tweak the dialogue, make sure everything's just right. Then, when we record the voice-actors, we're going to videotape the actors' faces too, so the animators can match the facial expressions. We don't want our characters to look like manikins."

FEEL THE FORCE

Unfortunately, the results are so far a bit difficult to judge. Not only are the final voices yet to be recorded, but Digital Extremes is also being understandably cagey about the plot. After all, it is the game's key feature and the company doesn't want to spoil it.

What we can tell you however, is this. The year is 2520. You are Jack Mason, a suicidally depressed doctor called to Earth – now a horrific prison colony – to escort a patient off-planet. You've been told your patient is a prisoner with a dangerous virus, but when you get there you find she's also a hot ex-military chick called Karina. On your way back, your dropship suddenly goes out of control

Pariah will have expansive outdoor levels.

No more heroes anymore.

Pariah impresses with its future-noir citiscapes.

The handling of vehicles is as smooth as in *UT2004*.

TWEAK YOUR TOOL

NO MORE MOANING WITH *PARIAH'S* CUSTOM WEAPON SYSTEM

In order to quiet the din of whingeing gamers complaining about weapon balancing, Digital Extremes has introduced a new weapon-tweaking feature into *Pariah's* multiplayer.

At the start of each match, you get to spend a number of points on your weapons using a kind of graphic equaliser interface. You can only carry two weapons into a multiplayer bout, so it only takes a few seconds, but you can very quickly change a weapon's power, how fast it uses ammo and a range of other parameters. It's only in the two to five per cent range, so it won't upset the gameplay too much, but it means you can customise your arsenal to some degree at least. "In every game we make, there's always somebody saying 'the rocket launcher's too powerful', or 'it does five per cent more splash damage than it should'," says James Schmalz. "Hopefully this will shut them up."

(sabotaged) and crashes into a forest. All hell breaks loose, and you find yourself fighting for survival with Karina at your side. As you make your way back to the prison however, the real story starts to unfold…

WHO'S THAT GIRL?

"We've tried to create a lot of really interesting mysteries right from the very beginning that draw you in," says James. "You find out who Karina really is, what the virus is and why they want to nuke the planet to get rid of her."

If you don't mind a slight spoiler (skip ahead a paragraph if you do), we've already discovered some of the answers. The so-called virus Karina is carrying turns out to be – no prizes – an immensely powerful weapon. She's been experimented on to be the first of a new breed of super-soldiers that can generate energy from the molecules in their bodies and project it outwards. And needless to say, you eventually get the power too.

Now, I know what you're thinking – what's the big deal? It's a bit of Jedi power mixed with a bit of military conspiracy, boiled up with a bit of despite-the-odds romance. Seen it all before. However, it's worth remembering that your beloved *Half-Life* was basically a skilful re-telling of *Doom* – scientists inadvertently open portal to another dimension, violence ensues. And as James points out, a good story has more to do with character and emotion than any sort of plot summary.

"When you think of a great movie, it's usually not the great effects that you remember. It's the emotional experience that's the important thing. Having a good story and having some sort of emotional buy into the characters is what's going to make a game more memorable and satisfying to people."
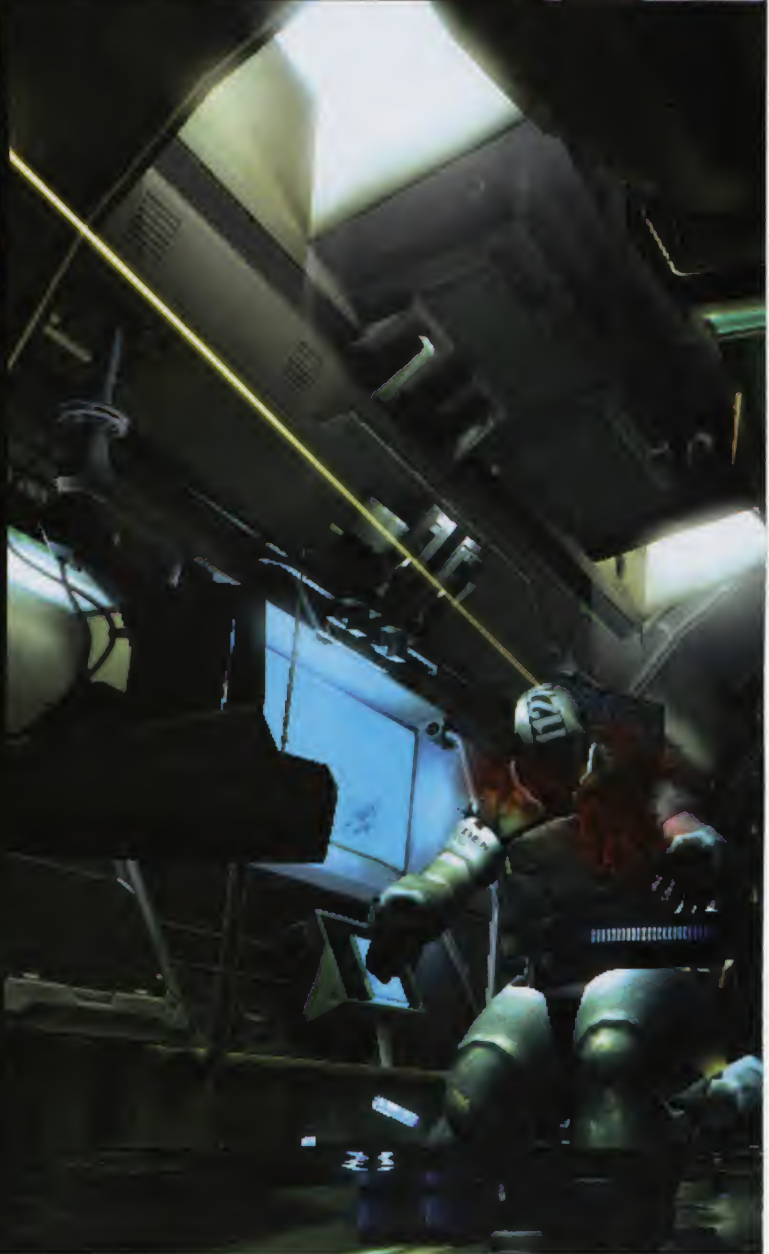
Digital Extremes is particularly mindful of the player's – your – relationship with Karina. Seeing as you inhabit the body of Jack in the game and rarely get to see him – er, you – Karina is very consciously designed to be the primary emotional and visual tie with the characters and situations.

"We've really worked on the relationship between Jack and Karina," says James. "We didn't want them to be stereotypical game characters, we wanted them to be much more believable. Karina isn't your scantily-clad female with big boobs. Jack isn't the typical ass-kicker guy. He's balding a little; he's got no background in weaponry. Even though they've crash-landed and have to fight for survival in the forest, he finds it difficult to trust her, and the way they gradually bond is a big part of the storyline."

Of course, we could talk about the story all day, but it doesn't tell you much about gameplay. From what we've seen, think *Halo* – especially in the use of vehicles – and possibly *Far Cry*, as *Pariah* is set 80 per cent outdoors.

There's also a strong nod to *Half-Life* in the way the story elements are integrated, with minimal use of cut-scenes and a strong sense of pace. Standard run-and-gun sections are interspersed with short on-rails shooting sequences and free-

A rocket launcher smoke trail is a beautiful thing.

roaming vehicular jaunts. "The vehicles are a bit *UT2004*-ish," says James. "We've got single, two-man and four-man varieties – six in total, though we may add more."

SUPERSIZE ME
As you'd expect from the creator of *Unreal Tournament*, *Pariah* also boasts a full multiplayer component. It seemed slightly skewed towards an Xbox audience

"Karina isn't scantily-clad and Jack isn't a typical badass. He's balding and has no background in weaponry"
JAMES SCHMALZ CREATIVE DIRECTOR, DIGITAL EXTREMES

Ol' blue eyes is back.

A luxury pool in every spaceship.

when we played it, but nonetheless offers a few interesting features. For a start, there are two new multiplayer game types: Siege and Front Line Assault. Siege sees you and your mates trying to protect a base from an onslaught of AI opponents, while FLA is a team-based game centred on capturing control points – similar to Advance And Secure in *Joint Ops*.

Classic modes like Deathmatch, Team Deathmatch and CTF are also in the mix, but with a new gameplay device to help keep things fresh. Says James: "We wanted to have all the familiarity there but with a different spin, so we've introduced upgradeable weapons. All the standard FPS weapons are used – the shotgun, the rocket launcher and so on – that's what people are used to. However, we didn't just want to do the same thing over again."

So, all the weapons in both single- and multiplayer are upgradeable through two or three levels, using pick-ups known as Weapon Energy Cores or WECs – left behind when you kill an enemy (see 'Tweak Your Tool', opposite). Using a pop-up menu, you can choose to upgrade your weapon, increase your dash time (a standard sprint function), top up your health or boost your shield: "Though we may change the health in favour of increased ammo capacity," muses James.

LOOK BEFORE YOU LEAP
The idea is, you have to think strategically about what to spend your upgrades on: whether it's a more powerful rocket launcher, a silencer for your sidearm or a stronger shield.

"What this gives us in the multiplayer games is the ability to grow into the role you want to play," says James. "Instead of picking a class at the start of a game, like medic or engineer, you work on developing the tools you need for it as you're playing. If you want to be a medic, you focus on upgrading your healing tool – the final upgrade of which allows you to resurrect your team-mates."

To make sure people who get a few upgrades don't become invincible, the final, most powerful upgrade you get in single-player is not in multiplayer. "The first two levels are more functional," says James. "So the grenade launcher upgrades to a poison grenade, the sniper rifle gets a heat-vision scope. So you get things that make your weapons more functional, without necessarily being more deadly."

It may sound cumbersome, but the process happens quickly in multiplayer matches – a matter of seconds or

WHY DON'T YOU?

UPGRADEABLE WEAPONS? HOW ABOUT UPGRADEABLE VEHICLES TOO?

While we've only played a very small portion of *Pariah* alpha code, we're quite taken with the idea of the upgradeable weapons. Sure, it's not a major breakthrough, but it is a neat way of adding variety and complexity to a standard weapon-set without having to reinvent the wheel.

However, it seems to us that FPS vehicles are also at risk of becoming a bit predictable and standardised – just look at the similarities between *Halo* and *UT2004*. As such, it'd make perfect sense to have an upgradeable vehicle system in *Pariah* to complement the upgradeable weapons. You could pick up Vehicle Energy Cores and use them to add speed, stability, extra mounted weapons or even a flying function to your vehicle, enabling you to reach previously unattainable areas or just kick much ass in multiplayer.

"That would be really cool," agrees James Schmalz. "Maybe for *Pariah 2*." You read it here first.

Imagine if you could load this baby up with more speed...

minutes, though WECs are significantly harder to come by in the solo campaign.

"It really adds a different flavour to the multiplayer game," grins James. "We wanted to get away from people running routes through the game, knowing the timing of when pick-ups were going to spawn. Now you have to confront enemy and kill them before you get a pick-up. It's a far more strategic way of handling things."

SINGLES MINGLE
While this may well be true, we suspect that these features will ultimately be far more interesting in the single-player game, where you have more than a split-second to think about how to distribute your WECs. Indeed, we can't help but think that *Pariah's* multiplayer game is a bit too console-oriented to have much of an impact on the PC – we'll wait and see.

In the meantime, *Pariah's* true power remains a mystery. With so much emphasis on things that must remain secret to preserve the experience (the plot), or that must be experienced at length to be fully appreciated (the emotional aspect of the storyline), it's nigh-on impossible for us to truly assess the game. Despite that rather large caveat, one thing we can say for sure is: if Digital Extremes gets it right, *Pariah* could be a revelation.

The addition of ploughing equipment made the Viper a hit with farmers.

Rainbow children go turbo.

It may go fast, but there's not much room for the kids in there.

Petrol heaven...

GTR

Suzy Wallace sets off after the safety car in what could be the most realistic driving sim yet

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER SimBin Development Team
PUBLISHER TBA
WEBSITE www.simbin.com
ETA November 2004

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

■ Hugely realistic racing simulation
■ Fantastic driving model
■ Meticulous attention to detail
■ Officially licensed content from the FIA GT series

IF YOU LIKE your driving games hardcore and uncompromising, your options are pretty limited these days. The hard simulation end of the spectrum, once a thriving and happy place, now consists of the *Grand Prix* series and not much else. If, however, you find the idea of driving an identikit Formula 1 car against the likes of Michael "yawn" Schumacher about as appealing as watching Vanessa Feltz discuss the merits of botox on *Cosmetic Surgery Live*, you'll be happy to know that upcoming driving sim *GTR* wants a piece of the action.

Based around the FIA GT series, the game sports the sort of cars you'd only normally see gracing the drives of footballers and rock stars (Ferraris, Porsches, Lamborghinis, etc). With each car tuned to within an inch of meltdown, this competition boasts none of the mind-numbing predictability of Formula 1, the high performance monsters jostling for position and executing sneaky overtaking manoeuvres at every turn. After racking up some mileage with the preview code I can also say that this promises to be one of the most realistic driving experiences

on the PC – so real, in fact, that when our production editor Clare took it for a test-drive, she had to stop after ten minutes owing to motion sickness.

A LABOUR OF LOVE

GTR is being developed by SimBin, a Swedish outfit that's producing the entire game out of its own pocket. You might not have heard of the team before, but it's got connections in all the right places. The president is a professional race driver and the developers have used actual FIA GT drivers to validate the car handling.

Attention to detail is the byword – the game has over 70 accurately modelled cars, ten highly detailed official tracks and three modes of play that cater for both hardcore and casual drivers. Fancy the instant adrenalin of an insanely quick but easy-to-drive car? Stick it on Arcade. Want a more realistic experience but aren't quite ready to dip your toes into full sim mode? Try the Semi-Pro setting. And of course if you're truly hardcore, there's the full Simulation mode. This boasts a super-realistic driving model, an accurate recreation of the championship and of

CV

SIMBIN

SimBin Development Team is a Swedish outfit set up in 2003 with a mission to "create the finest simulations, bound only by the limits of technology and imagination." *GTR* is the company's first title, but with Henrik Roos (a racing driver himself) as president and an exclusive deal allowing the team to produce multi-platform games based on the FIA GT series, SimBin could be set to make a big impression on the racing genre.

Stop for a quick cuppa with your Ferrari chums in the dry pit.

The view just after being hit by a car driving at high speed.

Driving a 600bhp car in the rain – not for the faint-hearted.

course the ability to tweak your car to your heart's content. This isn't out of bounds for novice drivers either, with a selection of driving aids, pre-defined set-ups, walkthroughs from the experts and advice on how to take each corner.

Of course, the true test of any racing game is the driving model, and from what I've seen SimBin's time under the bonnet has paid off. The physics-laden model provides one of the most realistic drives I've ever had, and each course is so accurately modelled you can actually feel the individual imperfections and debris under your wheels. Weather settings affect vehicle handling as well, and you can either select from a list of weather options or choose to experience things exactly as the series drivers did.

UP CLOSE AND DIRTY

With up to 56 cars on track at any one time, you'll have to fight for your position on the road, and even at this early stage the AI shows plenty of spirit. Opponents drive with all the aggression of human competitors – undertaking, overtaking and generally pulling off every move in the book to get around you. SimBin has also promised an online mode to test your skills against other drivers from around the world, as well as committing to regular online updates for the game.

All of which rounds off a curiously satisfying package. It's not often that a game comes out of nowhere to challenge the established veterans of a genre (*Far Cry* and *Operation Flashpoint* spring to mind), but *GTR* looks set do just that. With its combination of realism and fun and its exhilarating driving model, this Swedish beauty has all the credentials it needs. Check back next month for our in-depth review and definitive verdict. PCZ

Three prancing ponies, two MOTEC readouts and one safety car leading us round the track.

For sale. One careful lady owner.

"The experience is so real our production editor got car sick"

Not too fast now – the main thing is you get there in one piece.

AURAL PLEASURE

ENGINE NOISES IN GTR ARE MUSIC TO THE EARS

Given the choice of listening to anything in the world, I would personally decline the offer of Beethoven's most stirring symphony, shun the delights of Vivaldi's beautiful compositions, and instead strap myself into the driving seat of a souped-up uber-vehicle. Maybe that's just me, but the importance of audio has for too long been overlooked in the world of driving games. Of course, you've always had engine noises, but they've never truly captured the unbridled cacophony that assaults you when sitting in a racecar. SimBin, however, has gone all-out to make *GTR* sound just like the real thing.

Leaving no gear unturned, the team has faithfully sampled the engine notes and noises of every vehicle in the game, ensuring that each one sounds identical to its real-life counterpart. You'll also be happy to know that there's not just one level of 'road noise'. Up to 16 sound files can be played at any one time, so you can expect to hear the low burble of the exhaust, the whine of the straight-cut gearbox at high speeds, debris from the road bouncing off the car and a lot more. In short, *GTR* is a feast for the ears of any true car fanatic.

Team reports make it easier to gauge the potential of your squad and identify key players.

See your player's aches and pains in technicolour. Well, g[...]

Crewe: great manager, breezy train station.

Please stand up...

FOOTBALL MANAGER 2005

Steve Hill embarks on a mission to see if the old veteran still has the legs

WE'RE SICK of explaining this, but to reiterate for those who've been in prison (or simply aren't that interested in what is after all a fairly minor affair set against the scale of human suffering), the situation is this. Once upon a time, two fresh-faced young brothers made a computer game called *Championship Manager*. It was dead good and they flogged it to a big scary publisher in

London who insisted on retaining the rights to the name until the end of time. Both parties made lots and lots of money for over a decade, but they would sometimes argue and didn't love each other any more. They finally went their separate ways, and the two brothers – by now part of a 34-strong development house – had to think of a different name for their next game, while Eidos

parachuted in a reserve team to knock out the next *Champ Man*.

ON THE BALL

We'd seen it coming a long way off, and the fact that SI openly employed a PR agency to promote its name may also have offered a clue to seasoned industry-watchers. It was always a matter of when the split would come, rather than if.

After 212 years at Crewe, Dario knows a thing or two.

That's me that is.

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

■ It's the 'real' *Championship Manager*
■ From the original creator of the series
■ Except with a different name
■ And a new publisher

CV

SPORTS INTERACTIVE

For reasons of space – and the fact that it would be stultifyingly dull – we've omitted the numerous annual updates, but it's still an impressive if somewhat one-tracked output.

1992 The rudimentary *Championship Manager* hits the streets to mixed reviews, but for many, life will never be the same again.

1995 Perhaps predictably, *Champ Man 2* is next, and proves a more sophisticated affair.

1998 The long-awaited *Champ Man 3* shatters sales records, repaying Eidos' faith and spawning five seasonal updates.

2001 The largely irrelevant *Championship Manager Quiz* does little to satisfy fans, who are by now fervently awaiting the next true sequel.

2003 It finally arrives in the shape of *Champ Man 4*, replete with 2D match engine. Sales are vast, but many are left cold. The seasonal update irons out some issues, but SI's involvement comes to a close.

2004 A bit of a departure sees *NHL Eastside Hockey Manager* released as SI's first non-CM game. Essentially *Champ Man* on ice, the world shrugs.

Chester vs Rochdale. They don't come much bigger than that.

And while the situation isn't quite as bitter as David Van Day's Bucks Fizz touring against the real '81 Eurovision winners, it should make for an interesting Christmas, with bewildered punters floundering in the wake of unscrupulous retailers. If in doubt, 'buy both' would appear to be the message – but we strongly suggest you read the definitive reviews in your favourite PC magazine (or this one) before you do anything too hasty.

CUDDLY TOY

Thus far, the Eidos game has been more visible – with a hands-on appearance at the Game Stars Live show, for instance – but there is an atmosphere of calm at Sports Interactive, where we caught up with self-appointed mouthpiece Miles Jacobson. Dwarfed by his La-Z-Boy chair, and surrounded by cuddly toys (we hope this is an affectation), he gave us a comprehensive run-through of the game they're all calling *Football Manager*.

Ever one for the cloak and dagger approach, Jacobson mysteriously revealed: "Expect a few surprises on the league list score, there will certainly not be less…"

Tantalising stuff, but nothing compared to the bombshell that was to follow: "Just for you, I will actually give you an exclusive – The Peruvian League is added into the game." You heard it here first.

Elsewhere, *Football Manager 2005* appears to be having a sizeable overhaul from "our previous game", as *Champ Man* is now known at SI. As Jacobson explains: "We've changed the user interface completely – it's taking most of our testers about three or four hours to get used to it and not want to go back to the old system any more."

CODE SELFISH

As part of the divorce settlement, Eidos also retained the 'look and feel' of the game, but SI got to keep the database and the code. But as Jacobson insists: "Everything is based on improved code – it's a new game. *Football Manager* is a brand new game with a whole new interface to it. We've optimised and improved code all over the shop, but at the end of the day, we would have been pretty stupid to have ownership of the

"It's a new game with a new interface. We've optimised and improved the code, but we'd have been stupid to own the *03/04* code and not use it"

MILES JACOBSON SPORTS INTERACTIVE

03/04 code and then not use it."

From an initial play, the game would appear to have been made more accessible to newcomers, with a simple star rating for players, for instance. The media section is also being enhanced with the addition of a full-time scriptwriter, and in conjunction with PhysioRoom.com, there are now 60 types of realistic injuries featured. Evolution not revolution would appear to be the order of the day, and the message coming out if Sports Interactive is that it's business as usual.

"We've always thought of the game as a football RPG, but we're just trying to give it a bit more of that feel," says Jacobson. "We're trying to make it easy for new players as well as experienced players of our previous games." What could he mean? **PCZ**

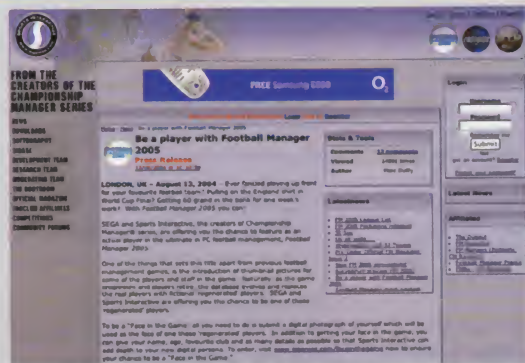**£100 a week? It's like playing for Everton.**

Sefton won't be happy with Leeds' position.

Gore is kept to a maximum.

A Witcher leads a lonely life.

"What do you mean you haven't brought any black candles?"

Evil beware...
THE WITCHER

Not for the first time, *Rhianna Pratchett* enters the witching hour

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER CDProjekt
PUBLISHER TBA
WEBSITE www.thewitcher.com
ETA Q2 2005

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Powered by BioWare's Aurora Engine
- Based on the world of Polish fantasy author Andrzej Sapkowski
- Dynamic action-combat system
- In-depth storyline

Zombies are a Witcher's favourite.

AS IF BEING poor in a fantasy world wasn't bad enough, there's always the chance that you might be plucked from your family and sent to live with a mysterious brotherhood with a penchant for force-feeding little kiddies strange potions. On the plus side, if you're one of the few lucky enough to survive the mutating process that these potions induce, then you get to train as a Witcher; the ultimate monster slayer in new action RPG *The Witcher*.

MONSTER MASH

Rather than being the usual holier-than-thou paladin-type, a Witcher is much more of a servant of money than of God. "These evil-thwarters may look unassumingly human," explains Ryszard Chojnowski, external designer on *The Witcher*. "However, they have great strength, agility and speed, as well as a vast knowledge about all kinds of monsters, which combine to allow them to execute lots of deadly combination moves and attacks."

In fact, hardcore battle action is something that the developer is keen to promote in *The Witcher*. Despite the fact that your main guy is a bit of a Billy-no-mates, he makes up for that by having more than a few slick moves up his sleeve, and many of his attacks have to be executed at the right time to have the best effect.

"We wanted combat to be more than just a *Diablo*-style click-fest, and make the players feel that they're an intrinsic part of the action," explains Ryszard.

Indeed, CDProjekt was so eager to get the fights just right, it hired Marcin Zmudzki – one of Poland's most renowned specialists in medieval weaponry and sword-fighting – to provide a source for the motion capture technology used to depict all the movements in the game.

POLE POSITION

The Witcher also takes its inspiration for the in-game world from the stories of best-selling Polish fantasy author Andrzej Sapkowski, who himself created the original Witcher discipline in his 1986 book of the same name.

Graphically, *The Witcher* uses BioWare's Aurora engine, the same one

It's the Aurora engine, but not as we know it.

used for *Neverwinter Nights*. However, the reason the game doesn't look as raggedy round the edges as the aforementioned title is that CDProjekt has removed the tile system that BioWare used originally so that *Neverwinter Nights* was easily moddable.

"We abandoned all the tile settings in the Aurora engine so we could create smoother-looking settings and include much more realistic environmental effects. You won't have seen these in the *Neverwinter Nights* games," says Ryszard.

It's amazing how unrecognisable the engine looks in fact, and it warms the gaming cockles to see recycling being used in such an effective way. We'll definitely be conjuring up more magical exploits from *The Witcher* in the next few months. PCZ
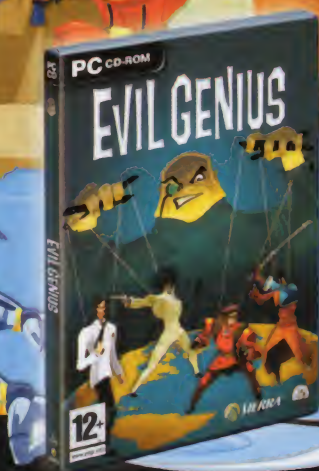
"PES 4 feels more balanced, more exciting and slightly faster, with more end-to-end play"

Scotland 0 – 1 England
2nd 61:

England
CMF 8 Scholes 170 cm Age 2

The runt of the litter.

Back of the net, son...

KONAMI KONAMI

Good stop fella.

LB Naysmith

Ronaldo CF

Brazil vs Scotland. Ronaldo vs Naysmith. I can see this is going to be close...

Sing when you're winning...

PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 4

The fourth coming is almost here. *Dave Woods* gets down on his knees...

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Konami
PUBLISHER Konami
WEBSITE www.konami.com
ETA November 2004

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

■ New version of the best footy game ever
■ Faster and hugely balanced
■ Improved presentation
■ Rewarding Master League campaign
■ Makes you smash gamepads into the desk

Switch
CMF Beckham

Check out those shorts...

Want treatment? Get off the pitch.

I USED to play football for Kenilworth Working Mens' Club (as good as it got for me), and every now and again this kid used to turn up and referee. A kid. Refereeing. Which is quite obviously incorrect. If you like football and you're young enough, you play – even if you're rubbish. Which is why I've never understood footy management games.

On your PC, you can score goals for your country even if you're rubbish and/or old. Why would you want to spend hours pouring over stats when you can pick the ball up, dribble past a few defenders and stick it in the top corner of the net? Why? And don't talk about realism, because since *Pro Evolution* was converted to the PC last year, that argument is a fallacy.

1-0

The good news is that on early inspection, *PES 4* actually improves things. Hard to believe if you've played and loved the game, but it's true. Cosmetics have been brushed up, with some brilliant animations and a few annoying ones (putting the ball down for a corner? No thanks...). Plus, there's now an on-screen referee who does very little (apart from ignoring the stupid handball rule that was introduced in *Pro Evolution Soccer 3*).

PES 4 also includes three officially licensed leagues (Dutch, Spanish and Italian, but sadly not the English), an improved Master League campaign and a recognisable figurehead in the form of Thierry Henry. But this is in danger of sounding like a *FIFA* preview. *PES* has

never been about the lip-gloss – it's about the way the game plays.

2-0

And once again it looks like Konami has got it spot-on. If you've played *PES* before, you'll know it's extremely difficult to explain why it's such a good game. In the same way that you can't tell someone how to play the game well (you just have to learn it for yourself over time), it's extremely hard to get down in black and white the subtle improvements that have been made.

Simply, the game feels more balanced, more exciting and slightly faster, with more end-to-end play. The real magic comes in the way you lose yourself completely for ten minutes, the way you stand-up and run round the room after a particularly brilliant goal, the foul language that accompanies every game like a foul stench, and the fact that no other game has ever come close to playing like a real game of football.

In *PES 4*, it's easier to play controlled passes, pull-backs from the byeline work much better and your other players seem more aware of where you are and where they should be to get the ball. Throw-ins are still hugely annoying though, and it's still extremely hard to score from a direct

free-kick. However, there's more of an emphasis on dribbling, something that was missing from the previous version.

GAME OF TWO HALVES

There are still a few things we're not happy about though. It's hard to believe that a bunch of programmers that can code the best game of football in the world can't spare five minutes to knock up a dedicated PC interface. It's harder to create a custom team than it is to dribble straight from kick-off and score.

Then there's the questionable morale system, which overly punishes you if you go a goal or two down in a match. More sinister is the fact that *PES 4* on Xbox is going to be online-enabled, but to date there's no word from Konami about the PC. It makes no sense – games like this don't work so well on the PC because a PC isn't a social beast, unlike a console and a sofa. If online code is up and running for Xbox, there's only one reason why Konami won't get it running on the PC as well. We'll withhold judgment, but we're going to be unimpressed if online play is pushed as a console exclusive.

But obviously, this is still preview code and there's still time to iron out the last few creases. And if the criticisms sound

harsh, I'd like to reiterate that *PES* has, and probably always will be, the best conversion of the best sport in the world. I moan because I know it so well and I want it to be perfect – if you like football, there's no other choice. Give me online play though, and I'll die a happy man.

New tactical set-piece routines help you deceive your opponent.

"Referee! Offside!"

Look, the card matches his shirt. How pleasing.

Injury time flashes up to show how long you've got to equalise.

IF YOU CAN'T BEAT 'EM...

USB adaptor + PS2 gamepad = happy days.

PC PADS JUST AREN'T UP TO THE JOB – SO GET ONE OF THESE INSTEAD

When we got the latest PC code for *PES 4*, we plugged in a couple of PC USB pads we had lying around, the dependable Microsoft Sidewinder and a Thrustmaster Firestorm.

Both are reasonably competent pads, both have scored well in this magazine and both are awful in comparison to the standard PS2 gamepads. Once you've played *PES* with one, you won't want to go back – the accuracy means you play the game rather than battle with your controller. So why are we telling you this? Because you can buy a USB adaptor that means you can plug these into your PC, giving you the exact same experience that you'd have on a PS2, but with better graphics. Order them now and you'll have them by the time the game goes on sale. As Mark Hughes would say: "Tidy!"

Soldiers came from far and wide to use the Imperial glory-hole.

Land battles are quick, casualties high.

Naval battles are visually impressive.

What's the story...

IMPERIAL GLORY

Richie Shoemaker attempts to outflank the latest *Total War* wannabe

IT WAS bound to happen – what really surprises us is just how long it took. Finally, a whole four years after *Shogun* first rode out, developers have started to follow the lead of (ie, rip off) Creative Assembly's *Total War* games. Pyro Studios – creator of *Commandos* and *Praetorians* – is aiming to do with *Total War* what *Cossacks* did with *Age*

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- It's *Total War* with bigger bangs
- Battle on land and sea
- Troops can make use of the environment and occupy buildings
- Impressive 3D battles

Allez les bleus!

Of Empires, namely take its trademark style of dynamic wargaming and march it through history a few hundred years. And maybe, just maybe, go one better.

Set in and around the Napoleonic Age, *Imperial Glory* allows you to take control of the British, French, Russian, Prussian or Austro-Hungarian Empires, the ultimate aim being to conquer a map that stretches from Ireland to the Middle East.

Divided into convenient Risk-style chunks, the campaign map plays host to the game's turn-based mode where, just as in *Total War*, buildings are built, armies are raised and plans are hatched. Predictably then, when two opposing armies meet, *Imperial Glory* goes real-time, troops are deployed and it all kicks off.

PAUSE FOR THOUGHT

It's the manner in which the battles play out that Pyro hopes will distinguish its game from *Total War*. While *Rome* peddles its now familiar blend of archery, charge and swordplay, *Imperial Glory* instead aims to recreate warfare from the dawn of industry. So, you've got cannon fire ripping through ranks of huddled troops, lines of musketeers raking pellets

through entire divisions and buildings and scenery being ripped apart in delightful physics-controlled explosions.

With so much metal flying about, bodies rapidly pile up and decisions have to be made quickly. To add to the immediacy, there's talk that the game will play without the safety net of a pause mode that allows you to direct your troops from stasis – a brave decision if followed through.

AGE OF IMPERIALISM

Imperial Glory may distinguish itself in other areas too. In a nod to the likes of *Civilization* and *Age Of Empires* the game will advance through three distinct ages, each time prompting you to take your Empire further down the route of republicanism, monarchy or dictatorship. Each style of government offers benefits to science, conscription or material wealth, as well as various drawbacks.

So far we're pretty impressed with *Imperial Glory*. Its Risk-style turn-based bits offer as much as *Total War* ever has, while the quickfire gunpowder battles are sure to challenge *Rome*'s pure clashes of steel and stone. Indeed, until Creative Assembly announces its intention to break open the gun cabinet, *Imperial Glory* could fill the gap just nicely. **PCZ**

Each empire has a Capital territory. Lose it and it's game over.

Go on, bet you can't write your name with that plasma trail.

Two developers, three publishers and three name changes later, it's ready for lift-off.

Tonight, I'm going to be...

NEXUS: THE JUPITER INCIDENT

The Stiletto: the only choice for the well-heeled space tyrant (sorry).

ON THE CD **ON THE DVD**

Richie Shoemaker was wondering what had happened to *Imperium Galactica III*...

COMING by way of a publisher that likes to tweak its own name every year or so, it didn't seem such a preposterous rumour that *Nexus* was about to be given a(nother) new moniker. So the story went, VU Games (aka Vivendi, Sierra) was going to turn *Nexus* (aka *Galaxy Andromeda*, *Imperium Galactica III*) into the next *Homeworld* and, had it been true, a great many people would have become rather piqued with excitement.

Yet, despite the obvious similarities of the star-spangled setting and mouse-driven ship combat, the two games are quite distinct. Where *Homeworld* is very much a traditional RTS with resources to hoard and a base to build before combat can commence, *Nexus* concerns itself almost exclusively with fleet-level tactics.

Nexus also won't be offering battles anywhere near the same scale as *Homeworld*. However, while the number of ships under your command is considerably smaller, *Nexus* compensates by giving you a great deal of control over each of your vessels, not only in terms of what your ships can do, but how they do it. For instance, you can navigate simply by right-clicking on an object on the screen, or you can create a set of elaborate waypoints and send your ship barrelling in and out of enemy craft like some intergalactic Volvo on ice skates.

Combat isn't simply a case of targeting and tapping the fire key and waiting for the inevitable bang either. Heavy weapons, torpedoes and lighter weapons (used to knock out specific ship systems) all require you to operate at certain ranges. With up to ten other ships in your fleet, not to mention having to contend with repair queues, mine fields, fighters, spaces stations and weapons platforms, it can all get rather hectic. You may be in command of hulking great dreadnoughts but the pace of the game is anything but sluggish.

IGNITION... LIFT-OFF?

Despite its turbulent and rather protracted development cycle (the original release date was back in 2001), the game still looks as impressive as it did four years ago, with ships arcing through asteroid fields and laser beams cutting through space. The prolonged building time has also ensured a solid product – even our pre-release version is remarkably stable and bug-free and clearly a lot of fine-tuning has been going on.

Whether or not the scale or scope of the combat will appeal to the masses is another matter, but if you've been waiting for or wanting something to take over where *Homeworld 2* left off, *Nexus* could well be the game to lift space strategy into a higher orbit. **PCZ**

Nexus gives a good impression of 3D space without disorienting.

Battles are surprisingly tactical and rewarding.

This is what hell looks like.

"That damn Von Trapp family's gotta be around here somewhere..."

The synchronised stooping team were improving daily.

One more time...

PAINKILLER: BATTLE OUT OF HELL

Will Porter, our increasingly unhinged purgatorial correspondent, reports from the depths of hell

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Dreamcatcher
PUBLISHER People Can Fly
WEBSITE www.painkillergame.com
ETA November

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

■ More *Painkiller*. Always good
■ Ten levels of hell, meaning ten hours of play
■ A few improved visual effects and niceties
■ Two new weapons

"Buildings collapse and tanks thunder around, bombs fall from the sky and zombies run amok with murder in mind"

DANTE, Virgil, Milton, Homer and the bloke who wrote the Revelations bit in the Bible. They all tried to describe the horrors of the underworld, yet all missed the mark spectacularly. Nope, it wasn't until plucky Polish developer People Can Fly managed to successfully recreate the sound of wooden stake on zombie face that modern civilisation truly realised the terrible fate that awaits those who sin. Or how fun it can be.

Now we have the expansion pack, containing all the things that expansion pack lore has demanded through the ages: new weapons (two) and new levels (ten), along with a difficulty rating that's gone through the roof. People Can Fly is holding its tarot cards pretty close to its chest, and most of *Battle Out Of Hell's* levels remain under wraps – apart from a sneak peak at a warped funfair and an insane Stalingrad level that the team let us fiddle with when they weren't looking.

MORE PAIN!

The key here is excess – more enemies, more bullets, more explosions and an exponentially increased need for the quickload button. To be honest, the level of onscreen action has been raised so high in the Stalingrad level that myself and my rig (itself pretty proficient at handling

Painkiller last time round) exchanged some fairly worried looks. Russian music chants in the background, buildings collapse and tanks thunder around; bombs fall from the sky, fat men run around laying dynamite in your tracks and Russian and German zombies run amok with murder on their minds. Basically, there's a hell of a lot going on here.

The new weapon we played with (half 'meh!' semi-machine gun, half 'ooh!' flamethrower) also proved useful in what seems to be an increased need to swap weapons in the game – cutting down on my previous loyalty to the stakegun.

You'd think that my love for *Battle Out Of Hell* would be a given: I've practically been pushing a *Painkiller* box around the office and calling it my baby for months.

However, I can't help but feel there's something missing in what I've played so far – perhaps because while *Painkiller*-proper had periods of chaos interspersed with moments of utter insanity, *BOUH* is a merciless, all-out onslaught where you sometimes feel you die out of course, rather than your own lack of skill. Of course, this is one level speaking – so I'm not going to be too hasty, especially not when the fairground level looks so sweet.

Battle Out Of Hell is on its way – stakes will fly, bosses will tower and Daniel Garner might just get to heaven after all. Whether I'll still be sane by the end of it is another matter entirely.

Welcome to the house of fun.

"Nice doggy."
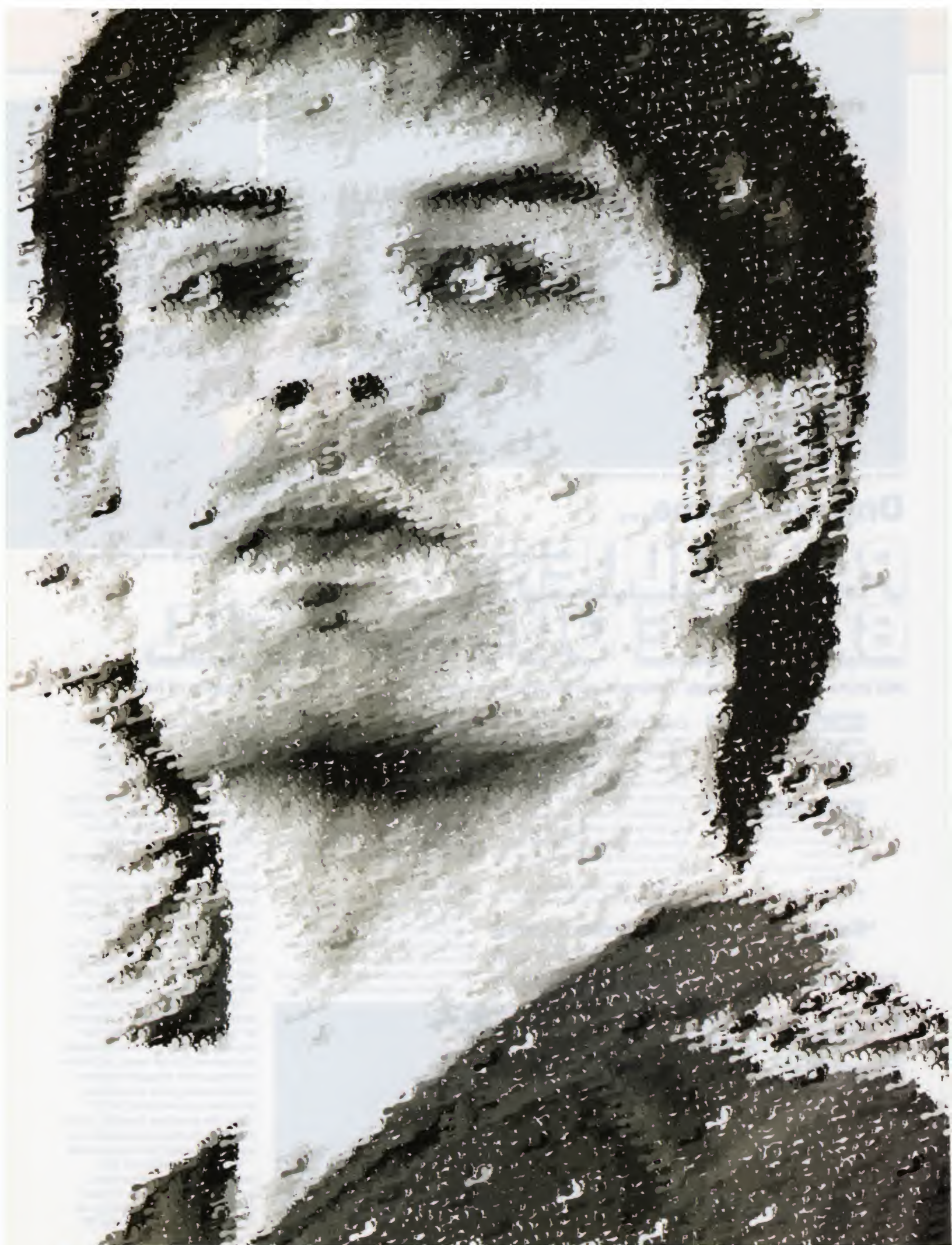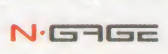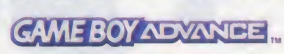
PHOTOGRAPHERS FOLLOW MY EVERY MOVE. ON THE PITCH.

Fernando Morientes

What makes a player great? On the pitch, it's not about image. The boot deal. Or the celebrity girlfriend. It's about ability. It's about great first-touch.

First-touch separates the great players from the good ones. FIFA Football 2005's all-new player kinetic system accurately reflects the first-touch of every player on the pitch at the push of a button, generating breathtaking passages of fluid play.

Put your skills to the test by tackling FIFA players from all over the world. Play FIFA Football 2005 online on PC, Xbox and PlayStation 2. Talk the talk via EA Messenger, then walk the walk on the pitch.

FIFA Football 2005's deeper Career Mode takes you through a 15-season quest for silverware. Choose the team and tactics, trade players to enhance your squad then do the business when it matters on match day.

FIFA

FIFA
FOOTBALL
2005

FLUID FOOTBALL

Out October

USING CORNERS AS COVER - STACK FORMATION - CHAIN OF COMMAND

"FULL SPECTRUM"
WARRIOR

USING CORNERS AS COVER
The corner of a building provides secure cover for firing at an enemy position.

1. The soldiers here use an over/under stance.

2. The hostile target across the street takes fire from both soldiers but cannot easily target them.

3. Cover degrades over time. In this case, pieces of the wall chip away as it is struck.

STACK FORMATION
Moving out in an urban combat environment is dangerous. The fire team in stack formation move down the wall as a single unit.

1. Moving along the wall in stack formation, the group moves as a single unit.

2. Each man maintains his assigned fire sector as he moves.

3. Rifleman maintains rear security.

CHAIN OF COMMAND
All soldiers follow the chain of command.

1. In a squad, all orders are given by the Team Leader

2. Team Leader gives the order to advance. Soldiers execute TL's orders, and move in a two-by-two formation.

"The action is intense, non-stop and constantly thrilling!"
PC Action

"Tripwire-Tense."
PC Gamer

THQ

REVIEWS

THE DEFINITIVE LOWDOWN ON ALL THE LATEST PC GAMES

BEST.
GAME.
EVER.

■ **ASSOCIATE EDITOR** Jamie Sefton

▲ Now then. A new era of *PC ZONE* has just swept me into the reviews section hot seat (well, slightly tepid seat) recently vacated by our Antipodean games expert Anthony Holden. And what's the first review I get to blather on about? No less than the biggest game on the planet – *Half-Life 2*. Yes, after more than half a decade, the sequel we've all been waiting for is here – and Anthony recently had the privilege of becoming the first UK journalist to play through Valve's futuristic first-person shooter from start to finish.

So, now we can finally answer the question we all want to know – is *Half-Life 2* any good? After the announcement of the original September 30 2003 launch date that *PC ZONE* exclusively revealed last May, it's been a tale of source code thefts, conspiracy theories, release date false alarms and misinformation that the G-Man himself would have been proud of. However, just forget all that nonsense and rejoice – *Half-Life 2* is everything we hoped for and much, much more. In fact, my first reviews section has kicked off with what we reckon is the best PC game ever made. Not bad, eh? You can read Ant's definitive review (without any major spoilers) on page 60.

Not only that, but we have Martin 'I shoot bear' Korda's review of The Creative Assembly's magnificent real-time strategy game *Rome: Total War* on page 74 (with the playable demo on our CDs and DVD this month), as well as *Colin McRae Rally 2005*, *Silent Hill 4: The Room*, *Total Club Manager 2005* and *Hidden & Dangerous 2: Sabre Squadron*. We also have the first UK review of strategy epic *Knights Of Honor* (see page 83), which if it hadn't been for *Half-Life 2* this month, would've been *my* nomination for best PC game ever – and I promise you, dear reader, that my decision has absolutely nothing at all to do with the fact

▼ that I'm in it...

HALF-LIFE 2 **60**

Half-Life 2 is here. Finally. The good news? It's officially the best game ever – check the review on page 60.

THE ZONE SCORING SYSTEM

Some people (mainly games publishers) say that our scoring system is harsh. It's not. It's honest and built around the seemingly outdated idea that 50 per cent is an average score. Likewise, 70 per cent is a good score, anything above 80 per cent is excellent, and 90 per cent and above is a Classic (see below). Talking of Classic awards, don't expect to see one every issue as we don't chuck them around like confetti.

OUR REVIEWERS

We think our reviewers are the best in the business. Each one is a specialist in numerous genres and will have played every major release, so no game is judged in isolation. We also

make sure the right game gets reviewed by the right person, which means you won't see Steve Hill reviewing an RPG and we won't let Will loose on *FIFA Football 2005*. You can have your say on the games and our reviews as well. If you have a comment to make, please email your views to letters@pczone.co.uk and entitle your email 'Feedback'.

ONLINE REVIEWS AND MULTIPLAYER UPDATES

We review a lot of games before they go on sale and if there are no public servers running before we go to print, we won't second-guess how the game's going to play online. Instead, you'll find dedicated online reviews of all the major releases in our regular Online Zone section.

Online Zone is also the place where we review online-only games, mods and major updates of online games. Between the two sections, we've got every gaming angle covered!

OUR PCS

We test games on a variety of systems so we can report how they perform in the real world. All our reviewed games are played on the manufacturer's minimum specification, as well as our own top-end rig – the Area-51 from Alienware (below).

PCZONE Z CLASSIC

Only games that score 90 per cent or more receive the coveted Classic award. The best of the best.

PCZONE Z ESSENTIAL

The second tier award for games scoring between 80 and 89 per cent. Essential purchases.

MEET THE TEAM

QUESTIONS

1. Currently playing?

2. What's your favourite moment in the original *Half-Life*?

DAVE WOODS

Half-Life 2. In my dreams

Swamping the company network with *Counter-Strike* sessions. It's team bonding...

JAMIE SEFTON

Star Wars Battlefront and *Counter-Strike: Source*

The amazing AI moment when I first shot a Black Ops soldier – he shouted "Medic!" and ran off

DEFINITIVE REVIEWS

COLIN MCRAE RALLY 2005 72

ROME: TOTAL WAR 74

KNIGHTS OF HONOR 82

ANTHONY HOLDEN
Half-Life 2 and Doom 3

Half-Life? Muck. Ask me about my favourite *Half-Life 2* moment...

PAUL PRESLEY
EverQuest II beta, Anarchy Online: Alien Invasion and GTR

Gordon dancing with the happy bunnies in the park of rainbows – or is that my mind protecting me?

WILL PORTER
The Suffering and Do You Like Horny Bunnies?

In *Opposing Force* where you meet two marines and charge down a valley into harm's way

MARTIN KORDA
Rome: Total War, Doom 3, Football Manager 2005 beta

Stoving in a zombie's head with my trusty crowbar

STEVE HILL
Football Manager 2005 beta and Leisure Suit Larry: MCL

Getting the cheque for the review

RICHIE SHOEMAKER
ArcElite

The falling elevator moment, followed by the first meeting with the Black Ops

Look at it. Look. At. It! It's everything we wanted it to be. And more.

Nice doggy...

Do you feel lucky, punks?

HALF-LIFE 2

PC ZONE CLASSIC
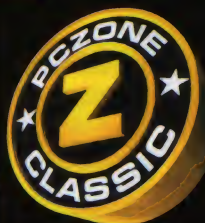
■ £TBC | Pub: VU Games | Dev: Valve Software |
ETA: November | www.valvesoftware.com

REQUIRES PIII 1.2GHz, 256MB RAM and a DirectX 7-compatible 3D card
DESIRES PIII 2.4GHz, 512MB RAM and a DirectX 9-compatible 3D card

The game to end all games is finally here.
Anthony Holden crowbars his way into
Valve to bring you the definitive review...

He had to split...

PINCH yourself, it's not a dream. The words you thought you might never hear have finally been uttered. "Rise and shine Mr Freeman. Your time has come again." It means this: the most anticipated game in the history of the universe, six years in the making, delayed for over 12 months, is now complete. Gordon

Freeman is back in action. The G-Man has spoken. And let me be the first to tell you (sharp intake of breath...) – it was worth the wait.

I must admit, the doubts had started to creep in. Why all the delays? Is the game not good enough? Is Valve in development hell? But thankfully, no – the delays were simply due to the fact that

everything had to be as near to perfect as the gods would allow. And believe it or not, they are. This game is so close to flawless it's painful to the eye. It's so beautifully constructed, so immaculate, I can barely bring myself to divulge its details. Everything I write puts a preconception in your minds that may alter

"**Half-Life 2** is the best FPS ever. It's beautiful, not only in looks, but in every part of its construction"

The coherent world created in the game is awe-inspiring.

the playing experience from the one intended, and that would be doing you a great disservice. But don't worry, I'm not going

to give the game away. I'll avoid specifics and give you only the bits you need to know.

THE LEGEND GROWS

Like this: best FPS ever. Yes, that's right. It's an honour I was never entirely happy to bestow on the original Half-Life, which, as far as I'm concerned, was just one of a clutch of equally great shooters around that time. But this time I have no hesitation: Half-Life 2 is the best first-person shooter ever. Indeed, it may well be the best action game ever, full stop. It's a huge statement to make, especially in a world of Max Paynes, Quakes, Splinter Cells and Halos. But it's true, and here's why.

Half-Life 2 is simply beautiful. Not only in looks, but in

Is it Halloween already?

every part of its construction. The environments themselves are breathtaking, diverse and immense, but rather than offering a series of randomly themed missions, Half-Life 2 plays like an 18-hour action film, scripted tight as a drum to make every second as involving and exciting as the last. Where one level of Doom 3 is largely

IN PERSPECTIVE

DOOM 3
Reviewed Issue 146, Score 90%
In a straight fight between these two heavyweights, id's kid would undoubtedly come off the worse, owing mostly to a lack of variety and imagination. That said, Doom 3 is still a beautifully scary game and a notable technical achievement.

FAR CRY
Reviewed Issue 140, Score 93%
To be perfectly honest, the noble Far Cry looks a little amateurish next to Valve's sequel, but its free-roaming outdoor gunplay remains otherwise unmatched.

CALL OF DUTY
Reviewed Issue 136, Score 94%
More about the chaos of war than cinematic storytelling, Call Of Duty is the ultimate war-based action game. The recent add-on has only deepened its appeal.

GOLD, SILVER, BRONZE

FIVE DIFFERENT PACKAGES: JUST HOW KEEN ARE YOU?

Never ones to follow convention, the lads at Valve are offering no less than five different purchase options when you buy Half-Life 2. Two boxed versions and three via Steam, dubbed Gold, Silver and Bronze, offer various extras and bonuses, designed to tempt you into proving how big a fan you are. Here's what you get:

STANDARD EDITION
The basic game on six CDs plus Counter-Strike: Source.
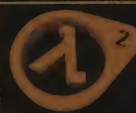
COLLECTOR'S EDITION
All that (on DVD), plus HL: Source, a T-shirt and a book.
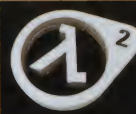
STEAM: BRONZE
Like the Standard retail edition, but via download.

STEAM: SILVER
All that, plus HL: Source, Day Of Defeat: Source and all of Valve's earlier titles.
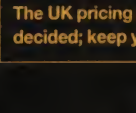
STEAM: GOLD
All that, plus a Prima guide, 3 posters, a hat, postcards, the soundtrack and more.

The UK pricing for each package is yet to be decided; keep your eyes on the Net for more.

A few SMG rounds will cure even the nastiest case of head-crabs.

"Shit, where is he? I can't see a thing in this bloody mask."

indistinguishable from the next, *Half-Life 2* shifts gears dramatically at every turn, with new and unexpected delights tumbling one after the other.

Even the opening level is a revelation, despite the fact that you spend its entirety bereft of weapons. I guarantee you'll spend the first half-hour of the game simply delighting in the world – testing the wonderfully generous physics properties (every loose item in the world can be picked up, thrown and usually destroyed), and marvelling at the looks and behaviour of the inhabitants. I know I spent a good 20 minutes simply throwing suitcases and litter at Combine grunts, then running away when they came at me with a cattle-prod.

SOFTLY, SOFTLY

It's the only shooter I've ever played where I wasn't frustrated not to have a gun in my hand straight away, wishing the opening stages would stop patronising me and let me shoot something. Here, you barely register the fact, so involving is the world around you.

When the shooting does begin, it begins with a vengeance. As dynamic and interactive as the world feels when you're empty-handed, with a gun in your hand it feels almost unnaturally violent. Every weapon, even the basic pistol, has a substantial, explosive feel to it. Later armaments like the Overwatch Pulse Rifle or SMG make you want to shoot at birds just to hear its thunderous cough.

The way barrels explode, the way wood shatters and splinters, the way blood splatters across

Oh, you sooo want to be Gordon Freeman, just look at that goatee.

propaganda-stained walls – everything you do has a gratifying force behind it. And though much of this is down to the Havok 2.0 physics, which we've seen plenty of times before, it's never been implemented with as much finesse and tightly-wound impact as in *Half-Life 2*.

TOTAL ACTION

Even so, shooting guns is only a small part of the game's rich palette. Certainly, parts of the game find you in familiar territory – gunning down Combine soldiers with headshots, fending off zombies with a crowbar – it's like you never left. But this kind of traditional FPSing occurs only in moments, carefully weighted segments defined by the game's flawless sense of pacing and surprise.

Just as you finish marvelling at one bullet-riddled set-piece, another huge gearshift sees you dodging rocket fire in an amphibious airboat, beating Manhacks (flying buzz saws) away with a crowbar, hurtling along a coastal highway in a turbo-powered dune buggy, building a bridge out of physics objects or leading a squad of rebels in a pitched street-battle. The action shifts and surges marvellously, never giving you time to tire of one gameplay style and always keeping you guessing. If *Rome* is *Total War*, *Half-Life 2* is total action.

GORDON, MESSIAH

Indeed, the game is so varied, it's difficult to name all the great gaming moments. Think of your favourite moment in any top shooter, and *Half-Life 2* will almost certainly have something to equal or better it. *Max Payne 2's* explosive shootouts and cunningly placed fuel barrels? Matched. *Call Of Duty's* epic, intense street battles? Beaten. *Doom 3's* terrifying zombie corridors? Out-spooked, and with the Gravity Gun in hand, a hell of a lot more fun too. Indeed, *Half-Life 2* could claim to beat every other shooter out there at its own game, not to mention doing stuff you've never seen before. It is, quite simply, the ultimate shooter experience.

have seemingly cast Black Mesa into insignificance. Where Gordon has been is only hinted at – somewhere away from the affairs of the world it seems – but upon his return, the battlefield has shifted.

It's no longer a simple case of Xen versus human. Under the aegis of a mysterious alien-human tyranny known as the Combine, the world has been transformed into a terrifying police state. Think *1984* meets cold war Russia meets *Star Wars*-era Galactic Empire, replete

"Gordon, why do you insist on wearing that bright orange suit? You look a right tit you know."

"*Max Payne 2's* shootouts? Matched. *Call Of Duty's* epic street battles? Beaten. *Doom 3*? Out-spooked"

Of course, the action would be but a mindless killing spree without a strong story to hold it all together, and here *Half-Life 2* shows perhaps its greatest genius. As promised, I'm not going to give away too much – the script, the plot, the unfolding scenario are all there to be discovered, not read in *PC ZONE*. But what I will say is it's not what you're expecting (unless you read the leaked script on the Net, in which case you get what you deserve).

The world of *Half-Life 2* is very different from the one we left behind. Many years have passed, and the events since

with Stormtrooper-like Combine soldiers.

ENOUGH ALREADY

I'll stop there, mainly because I'm being deliberately light on details, but also because the game itself is even more obscure. Most of the back-story and political situation are shown rather than told, with the details left to you to decipher. You're never spoon-fed or patronised – there's no clumsy PDA device with reams of emails to trawl through or a mysterious helper character giving you clues over a voice-com. The narrative simply

"Oi, ET! Step away from the vehicle."

SQUAD FOLLOWING

SUIT 18

AMMO 0

Laser-guided rockets vs tripods: a thing of beauty.

AMMO 42 225 2

Give you a nasty sting they will.

"I simply couldn't leave without tanking you." Geddit? Tanking? Oh, forget it.

emerges naturally through the course of the gameplay.

The whole thing is extremely elegant, and manages to keep you intrigued long after you've finished playing. In fact, I'd go so far as to say that after 30-something years, the medium of gaming has finally found its true narrative voice – a mode of storytelling that doesn't mimic cinema or graphic novels or anime, but rather blends elements of all of them to create something unique to videogames. The original *Half-Life* may be famed for weaving narrative seamlessly into the gameplay, but that was a clumsy hack job compared to *Half-Life 2*. *Deus Ex*, *Half-Life*, *Max Payne 2*, *Halo* – all these were but stepping-stones: this, for me, is when interactive storytelling comes of age.

MIX 'N' MATCH

The secret is not just in the way the game intersperses the action with in-game scripted conversations, but in the whole way scenarios are created to reveal narrative information. *Half-Life 2* mixes snatches of overheard conversation, music and audio cues, announcements blurting from loudspeakers, graffiti and posters on walls, momentary interactions with incidental characters and all sorts of other information encoded in the environment around you.

Witness the moment when you don your new HEV suit, the Mark 5, in which the scene and setting, combined with a single expertly placed audio cue, conspire to create a great

A novel approach to city parking.

HEALTH 100   SUIT 100

What a hothead...

Pomegranates: when all else fails.

Who's a pretty boy then?

Happiness is a warm crowbar.

A sign of things to come...

"Everything before was a stepping stone: interactive storytelling has come of age"

there, which adds that much more tension when Barney gets into a bit of trouble later in the game. He's also a funny bugger – his running gags and talk of 'head-humpers' provide many of the game's lighter moments.

COOL CHICK
Alyx Vance, the new female character, is equally well realised. As you'd expect, she's both sexy and intelligent. However, Valve hasn't relied solely on this to get you to care for her, imbuing the character with real charm and humanity. There's no trace of the victim or damsel about her – in fact, she has to save Gordon's arse on a couple of occasions, so you can forget about any of those annoying 'defend the useless woman' type missions. Alyx's pet robot, Dog, is also a creation of sheer brilliance, but I'll let you discover him for yourself.

But what, I hear you ask, about the graphics? Are they as good as *Doom 3*? Frankly,

I couldn't care less. If you bothered to measure it, *Half-Life 2* may not be as flashy in terms of dynamic lighting and pixel-shading or whatever, but the two games are utterly different, especially as the bulk of *Half-Life 2* takes place outdoors. (Personally, I thought *Doom 3* had a slightly plasticky look to it anyway.) If it's any

help, it looks a darn sight better than *Far Cry*, but the basic point is *Half-Life 2* is stunning.

LOOKING GOOD
A lot of this is down to the atmosphere and complexity of the environments, which are astonishing in their attention to detail. City 17 alone is a breathtaking achievement, and the first time you step out of the train station into the plaza, there's a moment of near disbelief to rival the waterfall scene in *Unreal*. Everything is beautifully designed, from the

gaming moment. And out of something that would, in any other game, be the bit when you picked up your equipment at the start of a level.

It's a simple example, but the point is *Half-Life 2* is different – better. It may well be our *Citizen Kane*. Either way, it's showing the way forward for storytelling in games – you'll want to play the whole thing again as soon as you finish.

HAVING A BARNEY
Like any story, the characters play a hugely important part in the success of the game, and

here *Half-Life 2* also shines. Barney, Gordon's old pal from Black Mesa, is a prime example. If this were a Hollywood action film, he'd be the one who died at the end of Act Two, being at once the heroic everyman and the comic sidekick. Though he only appears on the odd occasion, he's impossible not to like, and the way he jokes around and gently mocks Gordon gives us plenty of insight into Gordon's own character (despite the fact that Freeman never speaks).

There's clearly a lot of mutual respect and friendship

Early scenes from *Alien Vs Predator 2*.

88

100 45

Nothing like a quiet walk on the pier.

WOT NO MULTIPLAYER?

HALF-LIFE TO SHIP WITHOUT MULTIPLAYER, SORT OF…

Oh yeah – multiplayer. In all the excitement, we kind of forgot about that (though to be fair, some of us forgot our own names when we first saw the game running). And the answer? There is none. Which is to say, there's no *new* multiplayer game, in the sense of having a Deathmatch or Capture The Flag mode where you can use the *Half-Life 2* weapons, vehicles and environments.

What you do get is Source conversions of all the official *Half-Life* multiplayer stuff, starting with *Counter-Strike: Source*, to be followed shortly by *Day Of Defeat: Source* and eventually *Team Fortress: Source. (*Maybe even *Natural Selection: Source* from what we hear.) Valve is also going to

release *Half-Life: Source*, but unfortunately that won't include the original *Half-Life* multiplayer.

While this is a great reward to the hardcore community, its appeal to the average punter is questionable. I for one won't be rushing out to re-install *DoD* just because it's Havok-enabled. What's more, I think it would have been good to see at least a rudimentary multiplayer option set in the new *Half-Life 2* world.

Certainly, there are rich possibilities – racing with the new vehicles, sports games based on the Gravity Gun, human vs alien team-based modes – but it seems we'll have to wait for the mod community to exploit them.

HEALTH 26

Gordon Freeman: quantum physicist, MIT grad, daredevil.

smallest milk crate to the largest alien tripod. The facial animation is a revelation. What's more, enemies are diverse and frequently terrifying (poison zombies and fast zombies particularly so).

And the physics – my word, the physics. Apart from the sheer energy given to the game by the explosive, kinetic nature of things, the physics engine is

applied in a host of cool ways to produce new gameplay. One is in the area of puzzles, which are only occasional but usually rely on the application of some sort of physics property in their solution. You might have to stack bricks on a seesaw to lift you up to an otherwise inaccessible shelf; you might have to use floating barrels to make a bridge across troubled

"So, you brought me to this dark basement why?"

The squad-leading element is pretty minimal.

$ 2570

1:2 27 | 60

Counter-Strike: Source comes standard with every version of *Half-Life 2*.

100 100

Gordon, this is no time to be shooting hoops.

WHERE'S WALLY?

SPOTTING THE G-MAN IS A GAME IN ITSELF

The G-Man is one of *Half-Life's* most perplexing mysteries. Who is he? What's in his briefcase? And why does he talk like Agent Smith from *The Matrix*? Frankly, your guess is as good as ours, but what we do know is that he moves around the *Half-Life* universe with remarkable ease, appearing like a phantom in the most unlikely of places. In the original *Half-Life*, he crops up on more than 50 separate occasions (according to hardcore spotters),

though if you're not looking, you might just as easily miss him.

In *Half-Life 2*, it's much, much harder to spot the ambiguous bugger as he slides in and out of the game, but he's definitely still there. Keep your eyes open when you play the game and send your sightings (with screenshots if possible) to mailbox@pczone.co.uk. There'll be a fantastic prize for the top spotter (probably), but in the meantime, here's something to practice on...

HEALTH 100   SUIT 18

Can you see him yet? Maybe a red-and-white bobble hat would have helped...

"The best weapon, the Gravity Gun, turns the world into an interactive wonderland"

water. In every case, the results are ingenious.

IT GETS BETTER...

What's more, the greatest weapon in the game (and perhaps ever) is the so-called Zero Point Energy Gun or Gravity Gun. This sublime manipulator turns the game world into an interactive wonderland, enabling you to vacuum up any loose item and hurl it away with explosive force. The uses of the device range from clearing roadblocks by pushing cars off a cliff, to sucking Manhacks in and

smashing them against a wall. So great is this device, the game could happily have shipped without any other weapon (crowbar notwithstanding).

There are even a few moments of humour to be had. As you might have seen in the pre-release movies, the Ravenholm level encourages you to pick up circular saw blades and hurl them through packs of zombies, shredding them as you go. Chopping two or three zombies in half with one blade is probably the most satisfying thing you'll ever do in a game, but the added ability to

paint them white with tins of paint adds a comic touch.

Beyond such ingenuity, *Half-Life 2* must be commended for its sheer technical soundness. There's some really boring low-level stuff that the game simply gets right where so many others fail. Take ladders: the problem of falling off ladders or having trouble getting on the top rung doesn't exist in *Half-Life 2*. Boring I know, but pleasing nonetheless.

Or how about difficulty levels? The game offers the standard three difficulty modes, but here you can change

between them on-the-fly, right in the middle of a heavy firefight if you want to (and there are many of these, rest assured).

Even locked doors – often a source of frustration in a game – are neatly explained by the fact that the Combine has installed repressive security measures in the city. This game has thought of everything.

HANG ON A MINUTE...

Indeed, the only possible area of concern I have is with the AI. Expectations are high, given that the original game had the best AI of its day – but I'd have

to say on that basis, we're a tiny bit disappointed. This isn't to say there's anything quantifiably wrong with the AI – it's extremely competent – it's just not the leap forward we might have expected.

I'm talking mainly about the human enemies. Where the aliens and friendly characters are concerned, I have no complaints, but the Combine soldiers could have used better survival instincts. It's not that they do anything *wrong*, but occasionally they just seem a bit dense – reluctant to take cover, eager to rush head-on

You say overkill, I say you can't be too careful.   I'm sure it's just a warning shot.   Ant Lions: great with kids but they can be messy.

Oh yeah, she's definitely giving you the eye.

"Damn Rentakil said they'd be here 20 minutes ago..."

"It's almost flawless, a sublime cinematic thrill-ride you'll want to play again and again"

WHAT'S NEXT FOR VALVE?

TIGHT LIPS AT SEATTLE'S FINEST

With *Half-Life 2* finally complete, attentions at Valve must be turning to the next major project. But what is it? There's still work to be done on Steam of course, as well as the various Source conversions, but we've had no solid word on another full new game.

Hoping to catch him unawares, we pressed Valve PR man Doug Lombardi for some hints. "What's *Counter-Strike 2*?" he laughed when we tried that angle. "We never even announced that." OK, how about *Half-Life 3* – wasn't it always planned as a trilogy? "I don't know where that came from," he said, shaking his head. "That's just one of those rumours, like you had with *Star Wars*. We honestly don't know how many of these things we're going to make, we really don't."

Fair enough, and given the marathon development time of *Half-Life 2*, the Valve boys no doubt deserve a break. But rest assured folks – we'll be knocking on Valve's door again soon.

into a shotgun blast. On the upside they're very chatty – issuing orders and giving constant situation updates over their headsets – but other than that there's nothing too astonishing about them.

With every other part of the game rising to such amazing heights, we expected more. Retreating and regrouping, dragging off wounded comrades with one arm while laying down cover fire with the other, backtracking, flanking, mounting an organised charge... It just doesn't happen. Fortunately, it doesn't betray the experience too much.

Elsewhere, there are some great AI touches. The way the huge alien tripods track your movements is excellent, especially when they bend down to aim into your otherwise impregnable hiding place. The way zombies throw barrels at you, the way Ant Lions flock and swarm, the way friendly troops move and coordinate – it's all suitably impressive.

WHINGEING BASTARDS

Of course, no matter how brilliant this game is, some miserable detractors are always going to find fault with it. In an effort to pre-empt the backlash, I racked my brains to name five

things that are wrong with *Half-Life 2*. I managed it, eventually.

First, as mentioned, there's the AI, which is occasionally merely competent rather than awe-inspiring. Second, there are loading times between level areas that can last up to five or ten seconds (appalling I know). Third, the control interface is a bit old-fashioned. In fact, it's identical to *Half-Life*, which is great in terms of familiarity, but a bit limiting. Primarily, there's no lean function, which means you have to do a lot of old-fashioned strafing to take cover (see 'Missed Opportunity', p71).

Fourth – getting more tenuous now – the game has no

Another postcard moment.

Mirror, signal, gauss gun...

Ooh, that red really suits you.

OK, I'll admit, the abseiling animation is a bit camp too.

HMM, NOW THERE'S A POSER...

It's the most flawless, glorious FPS ever made, and now they want me to come up with a Missed Opportunity? Bugger...

OK, well, there is the lack of multiplayer I suppose (see 'Wot No Multiplayer?', p68), but otherwise I'm really at a loss. Leaning around corners? That might have been nice. It's a small point, but I do think it would have improved the game – after all, you can ramp up the difficulty of enemies that much higher if you can lean from cover, as witnessed in the rock-hard closing stages of *Soldier Of Fortune II*. And besides, Valve has merrily reinvented every other part of the FPS formula, so I don't see why the control setup was held sacred. But like I say, it's a minor point.

multiplayer component to speak of. Unless of course, you count *Counter-Strike: Source*, *TFC: Source* and *Day Of Defeat: Source*, which is a hell of a lot more than you got with *Half-Life*. Plus, the mod scene is about to burst a testicle in its eagerness to fill the rest. Finally, the closing battle

sequence is a tad on the easy side, and could be perceived as a teensy bit of an anticlimax. But saying that, the entire level leading up to the final battle is utter brilliance and puts a clever twist on your weapon loadout.

Other than that I can only imagine what people will find wrong with this game. It's too easy? Too hard? Too linear? Too, er... Violent?

Quite clearly, it's none of these things. It is in fact, a virtually flawless experience, a sublime, cinematic thrill-ride

that you'll want to play again and again. As some indication, when I first played the game, the excited game fan in me wanted to award it 100 per cent!

The score I settled on is the sober, cynical games reviewer in me insisting on taking off points for the few shortcomings I found. But in the realms of excellence we're taking about, the score matters little. *Half-Life 2* is simply the most essential gaming experience of the year, the game the entire FPS genre has been building towards for the past decade, and one of the defining moments of the videogame medium as a whole. Play it, enjoy it, savour it. Games may never get this good again. PCZ

PCZONE VERDICT

✔ Beautifully realised world
✔ Great storyline, script and characters
✔ Wonderful use of physics
✔ Excellent, powerful weapons
✔ Fantastic sense of pacing with huge variety of action
✘ No new multiplayer (yet)
✘ AI occasionally fails to impress

97

Quite possibly the best action game ever made

Hold still while I take a screenshot would you?

It's all about the checkpoints.

"Bleedin' sun's in me eyes..."

A nice bit of air coming up with that bridge.

COLIN MCRAE RALLY 2005

■ £29.99 | Pub: Codemasters | Dev: Codemasters | ETA: September 24 |
www.codemasters.com/colinmcrae2005

REQUIRES PIII 1GHz, 256MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card **DESIRES** PIII 2GHz, 512MB RAM and a 128MB 3D card

Steve Hill straps himself in for the second *Colin* of the year...

MCRAE? In September? Surely not. In the increasingly cluttered PC sporting calendar, the dour Scot's domain is traditionally early spring, the annual tyres 'n' mud update coinciding with the green shoots of recovery. Not this time though, which sees the PC version finally securing a simultaneous release with its console counterparts.

What this means is that it's been scarcely six months since *Colin McRae Rally 04*, which is actually still installed on my PC, along with numbers two and three. And you know what? I honestly can't tell the difference (there's the quote for the box).

This isn't necessarily a criticism, as there's only so much that can be done with a graphically accelerated rally car tearing round a series of global locations. The mantra this time round appears to be 'more, more, more', with *2005* boasting literally shitloads of tracks and cars. Throw in a championship where you get to 'be' Colin McRae, along with an extensive career mode, and there's plenty here to keep rally fans chomping at the bit.

FASTER AND SMOOTHER
The game is also noticeably quicker, with Codemasters claiming that it's a third faster than before, although this surely depends on how fast you choose to drive. That said, following the enforced caution of the ultra-realistic *Richard Burns Rally*, it's refreshing to be able to floor it, knowing that clipping a tree stump won't bring your race to a premature end.

That's not to say there aren't some spectacular crashes, and they're accompanied by a new dazing effect, the visual equivalent of being punched in the temple. Other minor tweaks include such subtleties as leaves falling gently from the tree that you've just desecrated.

The difference would appear to be in the detail, and it's not merely cosmetic, with a new hard steer function lessening the reliance on the handbrake.

Elsewhere, Nicky Grist is back in the passenger seat, and listening to his nasal directions is more important than ever as there are some wilfully misleading stages.

Essentially though, it's business as usual: gripping solo racing over exquisitely fashioned locales. Almost by default, it's the best rally game available, but whether that's enough to encourage you to fork out again if you've already got *Colin 04* is debatable. Having set the bar so high, it was never going to be a huge leap from the previous incarnation. Big things are promised for number six – with McRae himself even promising to help out now he's without a regular drive. For now though, this year's model is simply treading water. And mud. **PCZ**

Caution: slippery when wet.

PCZONE VERDICT

✔ Looks ace
✔ Plenty of variety
✗ Seen it all before
✗ Just had the last one

80

The best by default

ROME: TOTAL WAR

PCZONE Z CLASSIC

■ £34.99 | Pub: Activision | Dev: The Creative Assembly | ETA: October 1 | www.totalwar.com

REQUIRES PIII 1GHz, 128MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card **DESIRES** P4 2.5GHz, 512MB RAM and a 128MB 3D card

It's finally arrived, but can this long-awaited historical RTS conquer the world? *Martin Korda* **leads the charge to find out**

ON THE CD   ON THE DVD

INPERSPECTIVE

MEDIEVAL: TOTAL WAR
Reviewed Issue 120, Score 90%
While *Medieval* is still the second-best strategy game on the market, it's a shadow of *Rome's* genius. If you're new to the series and want to check out what *Total War* games are all about though, you'll probably find *Medieval* on the budget shelves within the next couple of months, so hang on till then.

WARRIOR KINGS: BATTLES
Reviewed Issue 128, Score 85%
Smaller in scale than *Rome*, this underrated RTS still features some meaty battles. If you like real-time resource management and mystical creatures, then *Warrior Kings: Battles* (now bundled with the equally good *Warrior Kings*) is your best bet.

MESMERISING.

Cerebral. Intuitive. Epic. Breathtaking. A masterpiece. *Rome: Total War* is all of these things. In fact, I'm almost tempted to leave it at that and simply send you skipping off to the shops to pick up a copy, safe in the knowledge that in a few days your eyes will be weeping blood from monitor glare, bladder haemorrhaging as you succumb to that all-consuming urge to play for just half an hour more. Of course, I'm not going to do that. After all I couldn't do that to you after all we've been through now could I? Course not.

But I am going to continue along similar lines, as despite a few foibles, faults and AI glitches, *Rome* is almost beyond reproach. In fact it's no exaggeration to say that

rarely, if ever, has there been an RTS that has so redefined its genre, so comprehensively swept aside the opposition, so utterly shifted the benchmark of quality, intensity and entertainment as *Rome*. It isn't just an improvement over its prequel *Medieval*, it's a quantum leap, another giant's stride up the road of RTS domination trod by developer The Creative Assembly since it released the groundbreaking *Shogun: Total War* in 2000.

A mere four short years later and *Shogun's* concept has evolved into an all-encompassing strategy game of warfare and intrigue, political machinations and personal advancement, subtle tactics and merciless brutality, melded expertly together to create perhaps the single most

Who are you calling Big Ears?

"If your name's not daarrrrn, you're not comin' in."

Assaulting a city just with cavalry is a bloody stupid thing to do.

JUMP IN THE FIRE

CAMPAIGNS ARE FOR WIMPS...

If you don't fancy the idea of spending weeks playing a campaign, then fear not, because *Rome* ships with eight cinematic and hugely taxing historical battles for you to pit your wits against. These range from city sieges where you batter down walls with flaming onagers (Roman catapults) to guiding a Roman legion to safety through barbarian-infested forests. There are also countless maps on which to contest custom battles, with up to eight spaces for either AI or human opponents/allies. War doesn't get much better than this.

Custom and one-off historical frays mean endless longevity.

"It isn't just an improvement over *Medieval*, it's a quantum leap, a giant's stride up the road of domination trod by The Creative Assembly"

comprehensive, visually impressive and immersing war game ever imagined. *Rome: Total War* has finally arrived and it's ready to conquer all.

Despite its multitude of advancements though, *Rome's* core remains unquestioningly loyal to its predecessors. Just like *Shogun* and *Medieval* before it, *Rome* is split into two distinct sections. One, a turn-based strategy segment in which you move your armies around the game map in order to conquer new territory (encompassing Europe, North Africa and Asia Minor) – and in

which you also deal with the finer points of running your empire. And two, a tongue-lollingly realistic real-time strategy battle section, where the game's true brilliance lies.

From the moment you first fire up the game and choose to command one of three Roman factions (Julii, Scipii and Brutii), to that distant day when your flag is unfurled in every corner of the known world to the delirious glee of your loyal Roman subjects, *Rome: Total War* simply oozes quality from every pore. A sea of possibilities awaits you, with

each faction offering an almost infinite and wildly varying number of paths for you to trample down.

WHEREVER I MAY ROME

Playing as Julii unlocks the barbarian-held, tree-matted lands of central Europe where Germans, Britons and Gauls await with their wild painted faces and massed but disorganised armies. Brutii brings you immediately into conflict with the tactically adept and organised Greeks, while Scipii offers an open route to the sprawling desert flatlands

of Carthage and Egypt.

Each side brings with it its own unique approach, and once you've completed the campaign with one of the above factions, you're then free to do it all again with any of the other major empires of the time, including Carthage, Egypt, Greece and the Gauls, meaning the game's replayability is higher than a drawn cup final's.

But believe me, you're not going to be playing through the campaign as any of these other nations any time soon. Newcomers will struggle to complete the Roman campaign

on even the medium difficulty setting, though the hardened vets among you (if you're shaving yourself with a machete right now, that's you) will find this level a little on the easy side. My advice? Head straight for 'Hard'.

One of *Rome's* most instantly noticeable upgrades from *Medieval* is the turn-based strategy map. Instead of the flat, featureless 2D map of old, you're now treated to a visually striking, feature-packed landscape. Hills, mountain ranges and lush forests tower majestically before your armies,

These boys clearly have an axe to grind.

WHEN ANIMALS ATTACK

INCENDIARY PIGS
Believe it or not, these walking bacon rashers were actually used in warfare by the Romans to frighten horses and war elephants with their high-pitched squeals. Of course they had to be covered in tar and set on fire first, but at least they made for a tasty ham sandwich after the battle.

WAR ELEPHANTS
An integral part of the Carthaginian army (in the game if not in real life), these massive beasts are almost unstoppable. Of course they can go mad and kill all your men, but don't worry, it's nothing a stake through the brain won't sort out pronto.
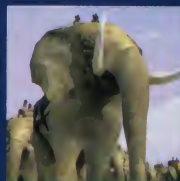
WAR DOGS
Before they were reduced to pathetic house-trained drones and attributed more importance than human beings by the middle and upper classes, dogs were vicious warriors trained to tear into enemies and disrupt their ranks with fangs and claws. Down Fido!

HORSES AND CHARIOTS
A well-drilled squad of cavalry was the most fearsome weapon on the battlefield. Some nations such as the Britons used horses to pull mighty chariots that carried archers and boasted devastating blades on their wheels that could give any nearby troops some rather nasty flesh wounds.

CAMELS
Slower than horses but more adept at carrying troops in the desert (faster and for longer), camel cavalry was commonplace in the Egyptian army. Camels also scared horses, making them a perfect counter to heavy western cavalry charges.

You can hire mercenaries to do your dirty work for you.

cities expand as you construct or upgrade buildings, and roads ferry seemingly never-ending lines of trading carts back and forth between your ever-expanding web of towns and cities. You can also build shipping routes and even transport your armies from port to port by boat, though don't go expecting real-time naval battles as these can sadly only be auto-resolved on the strategy map.

Simply managing your empire is a game in its own right. Maintaining the happiness of your people while balancing the economic demands you make on them in order to fuel your war effort is as precarious as walking a tightrope strung with razor wire, while mastering the art of diplomacy can prove to be the difference between victory and quick, genocidal extermination.

CHANGING ROMES
Promoting new generals and governors, satiating the bloodlust of your citizens with sporting arenas, maintaining just the right sized garrison in every town and city without leaving it open to revolt and making headway in the Senate are just a few of the near-countless tasks and trials which await you. Yet, contrary to the lamentations of the cynics and mewling crybabies who think *C&C: Generals* is the height of strategic complexity, *Rome* still manages to remain charmingly accessible even to the wide-eyed newcomer.

Whenever you feel swamped, confused or lost you'll find an advisor just one small mouse click away who'll take you through everything step by guided step in intricate yet eminently understandable detail. And if, after all this, you're still left gawping gormlessly at your monitor and

When a squad has had enough, they turn and run away.

scratching your head like a lice-ridden baboon, then you can simply choose to have all of your cities auto-managed by the computer and concentrate on the all-important pastime of killing and conquering.

HOLY ROMAN EMPIRE

Just like the Vatican in *Medieval*, the Senate plays a major role in *Rome*. Needless to say, the slave boy-flanked Senators are not your friends, and your ultimate goal is to oust these festering lard-buckets and take control of the Senate – and ultimately Rome itself.

All in good time of course, as first you have to gain influence and curry favour with the politicians by completing the Senate missions assigned to you. These generally charge you with either negotiating peace with or conquering a certain settlement, and while this may sound a mite basic – especially for fans of previous *Total War* games – these missions do help push you ever deeper into enemy territory, rather than hiding behind your city walls and consolidating.

Moving your armies around the map is quick and easy, though it can sometimes be hard to keep track of all of your armies once your Empire begins laying down roots in exotic and far off lands, and squinting at your monitor trying to identify isolated groups of troops in vast expanses of land can be both frustrating and fiddly.

Another huge innovation dropped into the *Total War* mix since *Medieval* is the introduction of area-sensitive battle maps. Unlike *Medieval*, where each province had just one set battlefield – meaning you'd often repeat the same battle during the course of a campaign – *Rome* has an almost infinite number of potential bloodbaths.

In fact, the exact location on which your army stands on the strategic map when it attacks (or is attacked) is replicated in gloriously rendered 3D on the real-time battlefield. And if you have two armies in close proximity to each other, you get to control one while the computer takes charge of the other – though these AI generals are all too often guilty of being rather too laid back when it comes to backing you up, which can cause all sorts of problems if you're heavily outnumbered and relying on their help.

ROME IS WHERE THE HEART IS

Right, that's the strategic map covered, which only leaves one thing. The battles. And you'll no doubt be pleased to know that we really have saved the best till last.

If you tuned in to watch BBC2's *Time Commanders* you'll be more than familiar with *Rome*'s real-time battle engine. What you may not know is that the version used on telly is now getting on for two years old. Oh yes. Meaning? That the engine in the finished version of *Rome* is even more impressive than the one you've seen on the Beeb.

Take it from me. The first time you're transported to the battlefield you're going to feel a real rush of exhilaration. Vistas sprawl majestically to the horizon, streams meander through forests and in the middle-distance stand your enemies, countless in number, baying like animals and waving their weapons defiantly. Every soldier has an incredible level of detail, right down to the individual rings on their chainmail.

Preceding every battle is a speech from your army's general (generated on the fly from thousands of voice samples) in which he divulges important information about your enemies. These tactical nuggets can prove invaluable, often helping you to find the
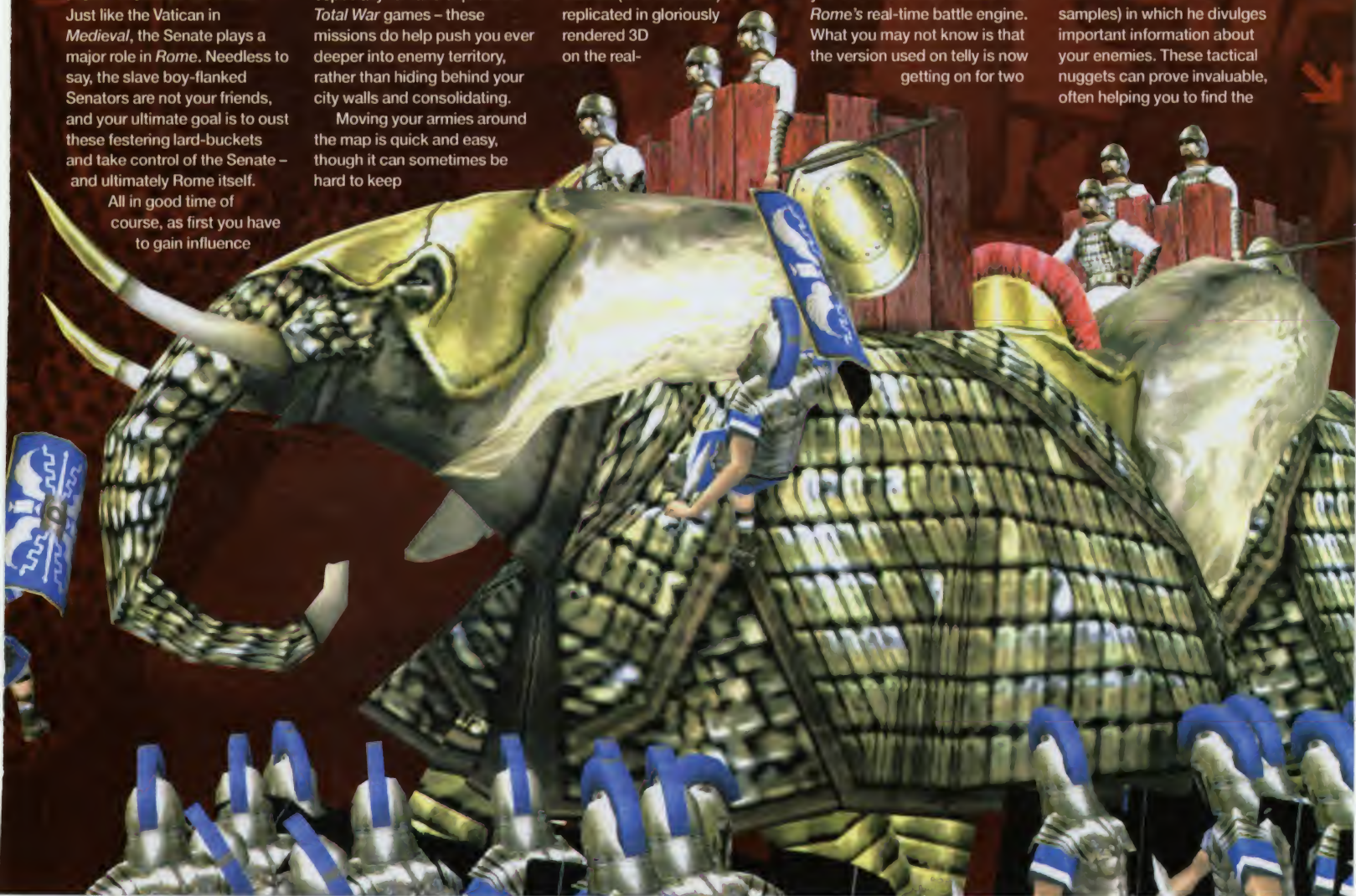
The level of detail is incredible.

right strategy to outmanoeuvre your opponent.

But the true genius of these battles is the realistic tactics. Unlike the majority of RTS games where weight of numbers always prevails, *Rome* allows the canny general to forge victory from seemingly unwinnable situations, thanks to real-life battle dynamics and tactics. Every one of the hundreds of units on offer has a strength and weakness, a purpose and use that if utilised can turn the tide of a battle in your favour. Height advantage, flanking and use of combined arms are all essential skills to learn, while working out how to take advantage of an opposing army's weaknesses will make world domination an all-the-more realistic prospect.

OH, THE HUMANITY

Soldiers clash with merciless ferocity, thrusting, parrying, pushing, stabbing and jumping as they hack at their enemies. Cavalry and war elephants decimate petrified ranks of poorly defended foot soldiers, sending dozens carving through the air with their tusks. Men turn and flee in a desperate

Looks like chops are on the menu tonight.

attempt to save their lives, only to be cut down by merciless horsemen as they run. And you now have even more time to enjoy these ocular delights, as the clunky control interface of *Medieval* has been dropped in favour of a more streamlined system that incorporates the tried and tested RTS drag-and-select mechanic.

And let's not forget the castle sieges either, which have also been revamped since *Medieval*. These are now titanic operations, with gates to be battered and walls to be scaled, while defenders rain down thick blankets of fire arrows

(archers can line walls) and gallons of burning oil on invading armies.

With the thundering soundtrack embellishing the already feverishly high atmosphere, conflicts reach a level of immersion and brilliance never before sniffed at by an RTS, and not even the occasional AI glitch (confused troops; the odd clipping error) can mar the game's quality to any significant extent.

So there you have it, *Rome* is everything we'd wished for and more, an RTS so far ahead of the current competition that it must almost feel embarrassed by its utter dominance. No doubt it'll come under fire from those with unrealistic expectations, who forget that despite its brilliance, it's still a game – not a life-altering experience – and feel aggrieved that it doesn't

transport them back in time (literally), saddle them on a horse, stick a rusty scimitar in their hand and wipe their backsides with silken toilet paper as they lead a cavalry charge at quaking peasants. It's their loss.

As a simulation of warfare and politics, tactics and economy there is no equal to *Rome*. It may be daunting in places and display the (very) occasional rough edge, but for the most part it's exceptional. My advice? Milk every ounce of enjoyment, every droplet of fun you can from it, because unless *The Lord Of The Rings: The*

Battle For Middle-Earth comes up trumps, we may not see another strategy game of this quality for a very, very long time to come. **PCZ**

City sieges would have been better with multi-leveled cities.

MESSING AROUND IN BOATS... AND CITIES

It's very hard to find missed opportunities when a game is this good, and it almost feels churlish to point any out. The most obvious omission is real-time naval combat (apparently omitted because The Creative Assembly wants to get it perfect for a future game), but to be honest you don't even notice its absence.

It's also a little disappointing that cities don't have levels that troops can fall back to like the city battles in *Return Of The King*, but again, this would only have been an embellishment to the already massively improved castle sieges.

A cavalry charge can decimate poorly protected formations.

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✔ Jaw-dropping battle engine
- ✔ Staggeringly deep yet intuitive strategy map
- ✔ Fiendishly lifelike AI
- ✔ Perfect for veterans and newcomers alike
- ✔ Intensely cinematic and atmospheric
- ✘ A few rough edges and bugs

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The greatest strategy game of our age

> "Sieges are titanic operations with gates to be battered and walls to be scaled"

The camera can be as unpredictable as the enemies.

"Mind your head on that pillar, mate."

All the holes lead back to Room 302.

SILENT HILL 4: THE ROOM

■ £29.99 | Pub: Konami | Dev: Konami | ETA: September 24 | www.konami.com/silenthill4

REQUIRES PIII 1GHz, 256MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card **DESIRES** P4 2GHz, 512MB RAM, a 64MB 3D card and a USB game pad

ON THE DVD

If *Michael Filby* gets trapped in his room, he hopes he won't be stuck with this

BACK IN issue 145, I made the claim that the survival horror genre was in danger of dying on its arse, and blamed it on the seemingly never-ending and never-evolving slew of *Resident Evil* and *Silent Hill* games. Konami's fourth instalment of their long-running series could have done so much to bring the franchise up to date but, unfortunately, ends up with little to win new fans.

The premise is intriguing – you play as Harry Townshend, who awakes after suffering nightmares for several nights to find that his front door has been chained up from the inside, and that nobody outside of his flat can hear his cries for help. Worse still, a mysterious hole has appeared next to his toilet, leading to slightly altered versions of the world he knows, complete with a menagerie of gruesome creatures guarding a series of cumbersome puzzles. The flat then basically becomes a hub to which you can return via the holes which appear through the 13 or so levels, where you can access your inventory trunk and the one and only save point.

At its best, *The Room* competently exercises the strengths of its predecessors, and you can quite easily become drawn into its disturbing and uncomfortable world. The story, once it gets going, holds the location jumping together well, with a steady stream of plot advancements, and is pitched at just the right level to keep you interested.

BOG OF THE DAMNED

Silent Hill's usual excellent design and presentation is in attendance, along with a decent quality soundtrack, although this is let down a tad by the blurry and incomplete-looking textures which suffer without a low-res TV screen to hide behind.

Where it really shoots itself in both kneecaps is in the laziness of the conversion, coupled with the same old problems inherent with the series. Despite getting a release at around the same time as its console cousins, it's obvious that whoever was responsible for porting the code across has made no effort to take advantage of the PC's capabilities. The virtually unusable mouse and keyboard controls make the use of a USB game pad essential, even during the game's unexplained switches to a first-person perspective during the sections in the flat. Tasks as simple as wandering around are frustrated by the controls reversing as the camera angle jumps, while during the frequent combat bits you'll spend more time fighting with the clunking movement mechanism than with the denizens of Silent Hill.

There's a pretty reasonable game underneath it all – hell, we'd even go so far as to say it's sporadically entertaining. There's just so much that irks though – being forced to revisit levels later on simply irritates, while making it more difficult to reach your save point from about halfway through the game is an absolute bloody cheek. Diehard fans of the series probably won't mind, but it's a shame that addressing some of the age-old problems couldn't have been part of the series' new direction. **PCZ**

"Do you have to make so much mess when you die, woman?"

PCZONE VERDICT

✔ Excellent character and enemy design
✔ Effectively creepy atmosphere
✘ Hideously unhelpful controls
✘ Yet another annoying save system
✘ Pixel-perfect precision needed to spot certain objects
✘ Revisiting levels becomes repetitive

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Well and truly over the Hill

The castle sieges provide something a little different. A little.

The desert conditions make little difference to gameplay.

Marrying off your minging daughter can prove tricky.

KNIGHTS OF HONOR

■ £29.99 | Pub: EA | Dev: Black Sea Studios | ETA: Out Now |
www.knightsofhonor.net

REQUIRES PIII 1GHz, 256MB RAM and a 16MB 3D card
DESIRES P4 1.5GHz, 512MB RAM and a broadband Internet connection

Steve O'Hagan's **had one to remember, one of adventure and even one of passion, but he's never had a knight of honor**

IF IT'S THE 'honor' bit of this medieval RTS that attracts you, pack up your plate mail, put away your livery and leave right now. *Knights Of Honor* is an empire builder that requires you to be more devious, dastardly and deadly than a door-to-door salesman. Your task is to

vanquish all those around you and be crowned Emperor of Europe, using means fair and foul. Predominantly foul though, seeing as the only way to finally overcome your neighbours is to put them to the sword.

Starting from either the 11th, 13th or 14th centuries, you are

given the choice of any of the kingdoms on the map, ranging from the mighty Byzantines to the lowly Welsh. (Obviously, starting out as a pan-continental empire rather than an impoverished, oppressed principality has an impact on how hard your task is.) Apart

from some quick practice battles using the simplistic combat engine, the full-on conquest mode is *KOH*'s only gameplay style. There are no scenarios, no missions, no levels. Needless to say, this is more than a little limiting to the game's longevity.

SERF'S UP

Though *KOH* is a detailed game, it's not so much realistic as merely medieval-themed. The units are all faithful to the era, as are the dispositions of the kingdoms, but most other factors, such as the spread of resources and who hates whom are randomised for each game.

The game area – which looks like it's been lifted directly from *Medieval: Total War* – is divided

woodlands. Unfortunately, this is all just window dressing, and the only thing you can interact with is the town that controls the region (apart from your armies of course).

Armies, as well as towns, spying operations and trade routes, are each managed by a single Knight. As you can only ever have a handful of Knights on the go, the amount of said

> ## "You're required to be more devious, dastardly and deadly than a door-to-door salesman"

into 150 or so territories. Each territory is governed by a town, and to conquer the territory, you capture the town.

Graphically, it's by no means unpleasant. Birds fly about, serfs push carts from village to village and animals rut heartily in the

armies, spies and trade routes you can operate is constantly limited, forcing you to focus on specific goals. This is good for making the game manageable, bad for strategic scope.

In each region's town, you have the familiar gamut of RTS

Day turns to night, but only every other decade or so.

BEWARE THE SEFTONATOR

IF THERE'S ONE RULER IN KOH THAT YOU SHOULD BE WARY OF, IT'S THE KING OF THE HIGHLANDERS

While covering the development of *Knights Of Honor*, our very own Jamie Sefton was offered the chance of featuring in the game, an honour which he gallantly accepted. One look at the screenshot reveals how accurately they have captured not only his heroic visage, but also his complex psychological makeup. Indeed, the triple traits of 'greedy', 'timid' and 'ungrateful' perfectly describe this wonderful human being.

Duly immortalised as the King of the Highlanders, his presence adds numerous gameplay dynamics. Playing as the Irish, I first tried to persuade him to marry one of my sons. He refused. When it came to my firstborn daughter, however, he was in there like a shot, despite the fact she was an outright minger. After this sordid matrimony was completed, of course, we crushed him – and his stupid kingdom – like a bug. That'll teach the big Northern jessie.

building options. The pattern of the game is familiar: gradually build up the structures in your towns that permit them to grow and prosper, which in turn allows you to build up your armies and your other methods of influence such as espionage and diplomacy.

Once push comes to shove on the battlefield, you can choose to take control of the fight or leave it for the AI to sort out. At first, you'll want to dive right in and direct the combat yourself, but once you've become frustrated with the simplistic and limited combat engine, you'll probably prefer to keep out of the blood-letting entirely. This may sound ridiculous to fans of *Total War*, but then this is no *Total War*.

At first appearing more confusing than the Hampton Court maze and more detailed than the Domesday Book, like a village idiot dressed in the finery

of a Baron, *Knights Of Honor* soon reveals itself to be extremely simple. Once you've got the flow of money, piety (what your churches 'produce') and books sorted, then you're pretty much in business.

ROYAL PAIN IN THE ARSE

There's also the intriguing matter of Kingdom Power to worry about. As you do reckless things such as declare war, this power decreases, meaning your population is more likely to revolt and you suffer a dip in income. Spending money and piety tops it back up. While this is an interesting concept, it ultimately adds little to the experience other than having one more thing to have to splash cash on.

The problem with *Knights Of Honor* is that getting your

money/piety/kingdom power economy working is a slightly laborious process, and one that doesn't vary much from game to game. It's one of those games where mastering the system is more important than a mastery of strategy. Even when you do set off on conquest it's no better. As there are only ever a handful of armies under your command at most, it's never a war of manoeuvre, it's a war of having the most, and best, men.

In all, *KOH* is a studious and elegant RTS that benefits from a smooth interface and a balanced system of game mechanics. But sadly there's only one way to play the game: slowly. It's really quite a sedate experience, in fact too sedate, and after a few plays, only the committed will want to stay with it. PCZ

Why, who might this churlish knave be? He looks familiar...

You can play from this strategic point of view, should that sort of thing float your boat.

All the villages, mines and monasteries around your town are pretty much just eye candy.

Visually, everything does its job very well.

PCZONE VERDICT

✔ Intricate yet simple to play
✔ Plenty of diplomacy and espionage options
✔ Massive, real-time game area
✘ Only one mode of play
✘ Combat system is weak
✘ Gameplay can drag

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Not a knight to remember (sorry)

TOTAL CLUB MANAGER 2005

■ £29.99 | Pub: EA Sports | Dev: EA Canada | ETA: October 22 |
www.totalclubmanager.com

Steve Hill declares the football management season open

Quality football monthly in game endorsement shock.

Let's have a look through the square window...

Stevie G nursing another injury.

A bit of aggro livens up proceedings.

Replays and everything.

AMID THE frenzied speculation over the forthcoming *Football Manager 2005* and *Championship Manager 5*, it's easy to forget EA's annual foray into the tactics and tantrums game. *Total Club Manager* is now in its third season, and offers an alternative to gamers who can't make the leap between watching dots on a monitor (as in *Champ Man*) and a game of association football.

TCM 2005 makes that transition for you, with matches presented in proper 3D using a variant of the *FIFA* engine. Of course the suspicion has always been that the matches are largely meaningless, and that

it's impossible to instill the reams of attributes and the variety of tactics on offer into a simple arcade game. The developers claim to have addressed this issue, and while it's still possible to get different results using the text engine and the graphics engine, this could as easily be put down to the random nature of football.

If you're going to have graphics, you might as well use them, and the good news is that

the matches are actually watchable, clocking in at a respectable sub-ten minutes, replete with a passable Motson/McCoist commentary. You can also switch between full screen action and a windowed mode, surrounded by the traditional trappings of management games such as player ratings.

Conventional wisdom dictates that once the players cross that white line, the manager can't do anything

about the outcome. *TCM* attempts to buck this concept with a slew of manager commands that can be barked from the sidelines. So whether you're winning or losing, you can order your charges to defend at all costs or shoot on sight, for instance. Of course, whether it makes a blind bit of difference is again debatable, and the fact that players seem to blankly ignore most requests could be attributed to the fact that they're pig-ignorant ne'er-do-wells who aren't fit to wear the shirt.

DONKEY WORK

Off the pitch, the interface is a largely bewildering affair, although thankfully such 'German' ideas as selling advertising hoardings can be delegated. As in fact can much of the game, leaving you with little to do but sit back and watch the action (of club and country should you choose to manage both simultaneously).

And it can be mildly entertaining. Whatever the dot-

watching purists maintain, there is something to be said for seeing your centre forward pick up a lofted pass, skin the defender and strum the ball into the onion bag.

In time, cracks do begin to appear, but as a third way to *FM2005* or *CM5*, there is some value to be had, and it's certainly an improvement on previous years. While we can't imagine anyone getting divorced over it, you could feasibly get through a few matches a day without ruining your appetite. **PZ**

"There's something to be said for seeing your forward strum the ball into the onion bag"

PCZONE VERDICT

✔ Reasonable match engine
✔ Highly customisable
✔ Actual fixtures
✗ Cluttered interface
✗ Debatable integrity

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The soft option

STRANGER

There are few hiding places in the more open levels.

Missions take place in France, Sicily and Libya.

"Hi, I wonder if you could tell me the way to Berlin please?"

REQUIRES FULL VERSION OF HIDDEN & DANGEROUS 2

HIDDEN & DANGEROUS 2: SABRE SQUADRON

■ £24.99 | Pub: Take-Two Interactive | Dev: Illusion Softworks | ETA: Out Now | www.hidden-and-dangerous.com

REQUIRES PIII 1GHz, 128MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card **DESIRES** P4 2GHz, 512MB RAM and a 128MB 3D card

Martin Korda drops behind enemy lines in *Hidden & Dangerous 2*'s first expansion pack

DESPITE its unarguable excellence, the *Hidden & Dangerous* series has always been lacking in one department. Polish. Like a beauty queen walking down a catwalk in only one shoe, it's more of a blemish than a disfigurement, but it's just enough to sully the games and prevent them from being considered true masterpieces.

I'd love to tell you that *Sabre Squadron* is the exception, that it's broken the mould and finally attained a sparkling veneer to go with its tense, tactical and superbly crafted WWII gameplay. Sadly, I can't.

TALK THE TALK
Despite bold claims by the developer that this expansion pack will iron out all of *H&D2*'s AI glitches, the same old problems abound. Your squad of four SAS soldiers, who embark on nine new, ever harder missions in Libya, Sicily and France, are still as erratic as ever. They often refuse to follow orders until

you've politely asked them three times, or open doors of their own accord, landing you in a world of hurt. Either that or they just stand in front of a door so no-one else can get through, meaning you have to switch to that soldier and manually move him before the rest of your squad can progress... Or escape.

But that's enough bitching, as everything else here is generally of a high standard. The nine new missions have been well crafted (though rarely do they reach the

standards of the original) and despite the odd exception, are both tense and – on the harder difficulty levels – brain-liquifyingly challenging. Also, while their pathfinding may stink, your team is now much more adept at covering you than before.

Objectives range from taking out German submarines at a military installation, to dropping behind enemy lines to mount surprise attacks on Axis forces. There's also plenty of new firepower on offer, the highlights being the satisfyingly meaty German Panzerschreck (bazooka), which is perfect for halting heavy armour. What's more, you even get to hop on board some vehicles yourself.

WALK THE WALK
However, *Sabre Squadron*'s main claim to fame is its new multiplayer options, which allow you and some friends to play any of the nine new levels co-operatively. With the team AI problems eradicated, these levels become far more calculated and precise affairs (so long as your team-mates work together of

course). It's a welcome addition, though it's somewhat surprising that it's taken Illusion so long to get co-operative gameplay into *H&D2*. After all, the *Rainbow Six* games have been doing this sort of thing for years.

As expansion packs go, *Sabre Squadron* is certainly worth your money, as it will provide you with countless hours of covert, squad-based action and some superb online gameplay. In fact, had it not been for the blemishes, it would have been an essential purchase. Illusion, get 'em sorted. Now. **PCZ**

That'll sting in the morning.

PCZONE VERDICT

✔ Brilliant new co-operative multiplayer mode
✔ Meaty weapons
✔ Nine new single-player missions for you to try
✗ Infuriating AI glitches
✗ Some clipping problems

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A double-edged sword

SUDDEN 3 STRIKE

Arms for Victory

A World War II Real-time Strategy Game

Battles for the Pacific Islands

www.fireglowgames.com

ALPHA BLACK ZERO: INTREPID PROTOCOL

■ £34.99 | Pub: Playlogic/GMX Media | Dev: Khaeon | ETA: Out Now

REQUIRES PIII 1GHz, 256MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card DESIRES P4 2GHz, 512MB RAM and a 128MB 3D card

Steve O'Hagan likes a bit more from his squad-based shooters

STICK A number, a colour and a letter from the Greek alphabet together and you get the name of an elite combat squad. Just try it – Khaeon did to come up with *Alpha Black Zero*, a futuristic team-based stealth/shooter that follows the exploits of an interplanetary anti-colonialist terrorist squad.

You play as ABZ leader Kyle Hardlaw in the year 2366, but despite this you have to achieve most of your mission goals using the kind of technology you could pick up now on the East African black market. Night vision, grenade launchers, silenced machine guns and sniper rifles – the times they aren't a-changing.

The missions are set across a pleasing array of alien planetary vistas, which instantly makes a

pleasant alternative to the oil refineries, disused factories and jungle encampments of most tactical shooters.

Did we say tactical? Actually, *ABZ* is almost anything other than tactical. Team-based it is, as there are four troopers in your squad, but the limited range and simplistic nature of the orders you can issue to your buddies means strategies are limited. Instead, you use your chums as back-up firepower, doing most of the donkey work yourself.

While this means *ABZ* is far from subtle or deep, it does make for a lot of action. There's much less creeping around than there is laying waste to all and sundry, which is *ABZ's* strong point. So for all the weak enemy AI and graphical glitches, *ABZ*

Create pretty patterns with your bullets.

They're queueing up.

remains a decent and carnage-filled team-based blaster, worth checking out when the price drops.

PCZONE VERDICT 61

Beta wait till budget

You can easily get lost in the huge outdoor levels.

THE CASE OF THE SILVER EARRING

■ £29.99 | Pub: Digital Jesters | Dev: Frogwares | ETA: Out Now

REQUIRES PIII 500, 128MB RAM and a 16MB 3D card
DESIRES PIII 1GHz, 256MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card

Rob Taylor dons his Deerstalker and grabs his pipe...

Bacon butty please mate...

Pick a card, any card.

That wasn't meant to happen...

Home chemistry sets were all the rage back then.

AS MUCH AS we know the genre is dead, if you're old enough you may still yearn for the halcyon days of point-and-click heros Threepwood and Knight. As such, any chance to rejuvenate the adventure genre is still welcome, even one as unlikely as *Adventures Of Sherlock Holmes: The Case Of*

The Silver Earring, Frogwares' second outing featuring the super-sleuth.

Alternating between the smacked-up Holmes and the stuffy Dr Watson, the game challenges you to solve the murder of construction tycoon Melvyn Bromsby, using tried and abandoned point-and-click

techniques. Holmes lovers will be chuffed to see cameos from Inspector Lestrade, Mycroft and Baker Street irregular Wiggins as you question witnesses and get quizzed on your findings. The rest of us will no doubt shrug and make grunting noises.

Surprisingly, *The Silver Earring* looks and sounds fairly

good, with convincing Victorian locations and competently crafted 3D models. The animation and lip-synching aren't up to much, but the classical score fits the quintessentially British goings-on perfectly, as does some surprisingly amusing and well-acted dialogue.

Unfortunately, this is as good as it gets. The plot is hackneyed, the pacing painful, the

pathfinding clunky, the puzzles obscure and the point-and-click interface unintuitive. But hey, we're talking graphic adventures here. Dedicated aficionados of the genre will lap it up. Everyone else would be well advised to leave this case unsolved.

PCZONE VERDICT 55

No: Shit Sherlock

WINGS OF WAR

■ £19.99 | Pub: Gathering | Dev: Silver Wish Games | ETA: Out Now

REQUIRES P4 1GHz, 128MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card **DESIRES** P4 1.8GHz, 256MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card

Flying hiiiiggghhh, high, *Paul Presley* is a bird in the sky...

The days when real men weren't afraid of garish paint schemes.

YOU'VE GOT to give them kudos for trying I suppose. While the entire games industry (bar the odd Russian developer or two) is fleeing like a Floridian pensioner from the hurricane of disaster that is the flight sim genre, Silver Wish Games not only jumps headfirst into the oncoming wind and rain, but jumps in with a World War ONE sim. There's brave and then...

Actually, 'sim' is pushing things a bit. The easy description of *Wings Of War* is LucasArts' *Secret Weapons Over Normandy* with biplanes, and set 20 years or so earlier. It's arcade flying at its most simple.

Missions all take place on giant landscapes and contain multiple objectives that are constantly updated as you fly. Realism is firmly tucked away in the drawer marked 'surplus to requirements'. *WOW*'s main

problem (aside from ploughing its furrow in a field of interest to very few people) is with pacing. Missions are just too long and leave your hands feeling numb. By the time you've shot down your 20th enemy plane before the first save point comes along, you really don't have much interest in seeing what comes next.

There's some novelty to be had from multiplayer – a sort of deathmatch in the air affair – but nothing that will make any kind of impression after you finish.

Old-timers may well remember the golden era of *Red Baron*, but those days are long gone my friends. Time to hang up the scarves.

PCZONE VERDICT 51
Fire and forget

"I keep telling you. I'm not a pigeon. Leave me alone!"

AURA: FATE OF THE AGES

■ £19.99 | Pub: Mindscape | Dev: The Adventure Company | ETA: Out Now

REQUIRES PIII 800MHz, 64MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card **DESIRES** That'll do you. It's not exactly *Half-Life 2*

Older than time and with more of a odorous funk than an actual aura, *Paul Presley* is the ideal man to etc etc...

HOW DO you open a locked door? You find a key, put it in the slot, turn it until the lock clicks and then pull the door handle. Not if you happen to live in an adventure game you don't.

To open a locked door in an

adventure game, you usually have to first discover the whereabouts of the key by travelling halfway across a bizarre landscape in which every rock is inscribed with an obscurely enigmatic zodiac

symbol. You then embark on twisting a series of differently-shaped levers into a combination that's revealed to you only after looking through a prism at the sun's reflection in a mystical puddle, before putting
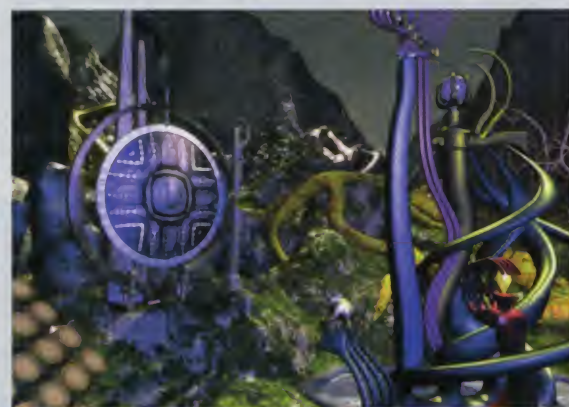
Wouldn't it be easier to have a big button marked 'On'?

the key into a completely different door in another building across a lake of fire. You usually then have to enter a combination based on the reverse order of the zodiac symbols seen earlier into an indescribably weird device sitting in an attic, and then turn the door handle backwards. And even then, you usually find the door doesn't lead where you expect it to, and the real one is off round the back

somewhere instead, disguised as a daffodil or something.

That's not actually one of the puzzles in obscure logic stretcher *Aura: Fate Of The Ages*, but it might as well be. It's not all bad. Apart from the acting and character animation. Oh, and the interface. And the story. True, some of the puzzles do make a twisted kind of sense. But there's nothing gripping about it. Life's too short, basically.

PCZONE VERDICT 47
Lost in the Myst

If only that globe was filled with whisky bottles to take away the pain.

TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 2005

■ £29.99 | Pub: EA Sports | Dev: EA | ETA: Out Now

REQUIRES PIII 1GHz, 128MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card **DESIRES** P4 2GHz, 512MB RAM, a 128MB 3D card and an Internet connection

"I'm Tiger Woods!" No, you're *Dave Woods*, there's a difference. A few hundred million of them in fact

WHEN IT comes to sports games, it's not how they look but how they play that really counts. As you'd expect, this year's *Tiger Woods* is flash and buffed to within an inch of his life, but unlike the recent *FIFA* incarnation, he's actually packing it in the trouser department as well.

Skipping quickly past the eight new (and beautifully rendered) licensed courses and

15 PGA tour players, *Tiger Woods 2005's* big boast is TigerProofing. This lets you take courses and tweak options like the width of the fairway and size of the green, so that even Tiger Woods would struggle. Similarly, Game Face II lets you tweak your own in-game features, and amusingly includes braces, tattoos and discoloured teeth.

Both are great additions, but when you're boasting about

them as the main draw of the game, it's easy to see that EA has perfected the core gameplay and is having to look sideways to justify its annual update.

The usual array of tourneys, online options and bite-sized challenges are in here, but, while I've enjoyed previous versions of the game, it still feels odd that you can pick up a new golf game and slam the ball to within a few feet of the hole without trying. It

might be a whole lot of fun and it might be the best golf game you can buy, but unless you create your own courses, there's very little challenge here.

It's like looking in a mirror...

"Hey, I'm an athlete, OK?"

We got this one TigerProofed up the yinyang.

NHL 2005

■ £29.99 | Pub: EA Sports | Dev: EA | ETA: Out Now

REQUIRES PIII 1GHz, 128MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card
DESIRES P4 2GHz, 512MB RAM, a 128MB 3D card and an Internet connection

Jamie Sefton reckons *NHL 2005* is the icing on EA Sports' cake. Icing? See? Oh just read the review would you...

UNLIKE *FIFA*, EA's *NHL* games have been consistently excellent over the years, and the good news for fans of this quality ice hockey series is that *2005* is the best yet. Featuring a brand new graphics engine that has the beautifully-rendered ice hockey stars skimming about more smoothly than the cast of Beauty And The Beast On Ice, *NHL 2005* is an incredibly polished product – if you don't believe us just check out the shine on those helmets (ha ha).

Firstly, the presentation is absolutely top-notch, with superb commentary, sound effects and enough TV-style replays and cut-aways to convince you you're watching a live US broadcast. Also, as it's EA, you know that you're going to have all the properly licensed

international and NHL teams, with spookily accurate likenesses of all the players.

Jump straight in and it plays like a dream – you really get a feeling of momentum with the players shooshing around on the ice. With a little practice you'll soon be smacking the puck around like a toothless Canadian, and the resulting matches are fast, brutal, exciting and unpredictable.

What's more, the player AI is now tuned to individual personalities, so if you slam an opponent with a fiery temper you'd better be prepared to trade blows in the now-legendary fighting mini-game.

As for the other gameplay modes, the *Champ Man*-lite feel of the Dynasty Mode has been expanded, so you now get emails from the owner of your

"Aw sheeit Wayne, I've gone and lost me last tooth..."

team giving you praise or a bollocking, plus there's a comprehensive choice of online options. All in all, *NHL 2005* is the only ice hockey game worth giving a flying puck about.

Tripping, choking and slamming are all legitimate tactics.

PAIN   SUFFE

IT'S COM

DOOM³

SUPERTEST:
STEALTH GAMES

THE CONTENDERS

MANHUNT
ISSUE 143,
SCORE 74%

HITMAN: CONTRACTS
ISSUE 143,
SCORE 72%

THIEF: DEADLY SHADOWS
ISSUE 144, SCORE 85%
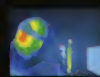
SPLINTER CELL
ISSUE 125,
SCORE 94%

SPLINTER CELL: P. TOMORROW
ISSUE 141, SCORE 89%

Martin Korda **and his team of super spies infiltrate the stealth genre to find out which game holds the top spot...**

EMERGING WITH all the swiftness and force of a ninja assassin in early 1998, the stealth genre now has a secure and respected place in the gaming spectrum. From *Tenchu* and *Thief* right through to the upcoming *Splinter Cell 3*, the genre has evolved hugely in its six short years, with enormously improved gameplay mechanics and far more lifelike worlds to sneak around in.

While the arrival of a new sneak 'em up is still comparatively rare, the quality bar for these titles has been raised hugely of late, and this always promised to be a hard-fought Supertest. With both new and old franchises vying for the title of top stealther, which games are top of the stealth pile, and which aren't even worth sneaking out for? Read on to find out...

ILLUSTRATION Jamie Smith

SPLINTER CELL

Anthony: It's brilliant. It takes all the best bits of *Metal Gear*, *Thief* and *Tenchu* and makes them work a lot better and more coherently. It has the most complex and satisfying stealth dynamic.

Martin: I agree – it doesn't feel like so much of a puzzle game. A lot of these other games and the ones that came before *Splinter Cell* feel so rigid in their mechanics, where you can hide, what you can do and when the AI can see you. Here, you feel like you're in a real world with real people. The AI isn't perfect, but it's more than realistic enough to make you feel tense when you're being hunted. The enemy's field of vision doesn't feel artificially created by some kind of game mechanic.

Anthony: Definitely. The 'Vision Cone' idea worked well enough in *Metal Gear Solid*, but it was annoying even then, because you could be standing 10ft in front of an enemy and they wouldn't see you. It worked as a gameplay device, but I'm glad that *Splinter Cell* got rid of such outdated *Metal Gear* baggage.

Jamie: *Metal Gear* shouted 'videogame!', whereas *Splinter Cell* feels more like the real world.

Anthony: But at the same time, *Metal Gear* set down the rules for stealth games – establishing the puzzle aspect whereby you'd walk into a room and there'd be all of these different animals…

Martin: Animals?

Anthony: Er, I mean elements – but animals as well.
(Everyone laughs.)

Anthony: Yeah, different elements, where you'd have to work out how all of the cameras and guards were moving and figure out how to get past them.

Martin: *Splinter Cell* has taken stealth games to the next level. The puzzles are far more clever and lifelike – like using your heat vision goggles to identify heat signatures on keypads to gain access codes.

Anthony: And *Splinter Cell* is cool. That's very important.

Martin: You mean animal?

Will: I'd like to be Sam Fisher, which must mean something. He does things that are just really cool, all those Jackie Chan moves and swinging from walls. The game has a really great 'wow, I just did that!' factor.

Paul: I think it's way too restrictive. You can hang on one wire but not on another, despite the fact that there's no reason why you shouldn't be able to. It's very linear in that respect. I think it does a very good job of giving an artificial impression of being freeform. Once you've figured out a level, that's it – there's no other way of doing it.

Anthony: That's true to some extent, but less so in later levels.

Jamie: The jumping sections work as well as they can.

Martin: One thing that I think we should address early on here is the concept of pacing. There's a real problem with a lot of stealth games, where they either degenerate into glorified shooters with a modicum of stealth, or they're totally obsessed with stealth and

nothing else. Out of all today's games, *Splinter Cell* has by far the best pacing. It's got action followed by stealth, a good storyline, peaks and troughs and twists and turns.

Anthony: You're right, there's loads of variety in there.

Martin: You can't have a stealth game that only has stealth, and I don't care how well designed the levels are. You have to have some different action that evokes different emotions other than tension. *Splinter Cell* is so brilliantly paced, that when the stealth elements do kick in – and there are plenty of them – they're that much more enjoyable.

Anthony: The gunfights and ticking time bomb-style bits are non-stealth, but still great.

Martin: The incidental dialogue of the enemies is also very amusing. You don't always feel like they're saying the same thing over and over again. It adds a real sense of immersion.

Paul: It's so much better than the 'Oh well, must 'ave been moi imagination' comments you usually get.

Anthony: Or, 'Huh? Just a box'.
(Everyone laughs.)

SPLINTER CELL: PANDORA TOMORROW

Martin: The single-player game is far inferior to the original. It's all about the multiplayer for me.

Anthony: It feels like a pretty workmanlike add-on pack on the single-player side. If it'd only shipped with the single-player game, it would probably have scored around 70 per cent. The worst thing about it is that some dickheads on the Internet were complaining that the original was too difficult, so the developer dumbed the AI down.

Paul: It's so shoddily put

together and artificially scripted. It shatters all of the emotion.

Jamie: The multiplayer is great though.

Will: We hadn't got so excited about a multiplayer game for a long time when it first arrived in the office.

Anthony: Lazy stealth developers in the past claimed that stealth multiplayer would never work – this proves that was utter crap.

Martin: There's nothing more tense than

being hunted. If you go back to *AvP2*, where you had Predators hunting marines in darkened levels, it was obvious back then that this kind of game could work in multiplayer. But no-one picked up on it until now. *Pandora Tomorrow* has taken that concept to the next level though, because if you're playing as a Shadownet, your weapons are really weedy, and you have to rely on your stealth skills.

Those three little lights give him away every time…

> ## "I'd like to be Sam Fisher, which must mean something. There's a real 'wow!' factor"
> **WILL PORTER** FAVOURS THE ORIGINAL *SPLINTER CELL*

Just another day at the office.

Anthony: The balance is superb.

Paul: And you really have to work with the other people on your team.

Jamie: I saw the *Splinter Cell 3* demo, and it looks like it's really going to do justice to this style of gameplay. You'll be able to do things like give your team-mates leg-ups, or one of you can distract an enemy while the other creeps up behind.

Paul: When I first played it, I thought that only being able to have four players in multiplayer would be really restrictive. But having teams of two makes for a really interesting team dynamic. From an online point of view though, it's clearly targeted at a very specific audience. Most people who play online games won't want to take the time to master it and learn the levels.

Martin: But I think that's true in the single-player game too. It takes a certain type of person to play these games. You have to be very patient, otherwise you can get bored of the whole thing very quickly, especially when the single-player game is a disappointment, like here.

Anthony: And it's probably not even worth buying at its current price, as not that many people are playing it online.

Paul: The multiplayer game is a massive step forward, but personally, I'd wait for *Splinter Cell 3* instead of buying this.

HITMAN: CONTRACTS

Paul: There are a lot of faults with this game. But I love the pacing and the story, and the way it flashes back is great. *(Anthony wrinkles his nose in disgust.)*

Paul: There are so many different ways of completing each level.

Anthony: To an extent, that's true. But the fact that you can just run around a level like an idiot, find out where everything is hidden, then go back and still be able to complete the level by using stealth shows just how badly designed this game is.

Will: I like that though, because it feels even more like a puzzle game. I like being able to work out where all the puzzles are, and then going back and solving them all.

Anthony: It certainly has the most puzzle-like elements of all the games here. It gives you the impression that there are lots of options in each level, but it always turns out that there's an 'ideal path' through the level that the designers clearly want you to take.

Will: There's something very satisfying about working out each puzzle though – that's why I like it so much.

Martin: So it's kind of a point-and-click stealth adventure then? *(Guffaws.)*

Anthony: I just think it's ridiculously contrived.

Jamie: That's why when I played it, I just went through each level shooting everyone. In fact, that's what I liked most about it. The whole game design just gets so frustrating, that I end up wanting to play it as a shooter.

Martin: Any stealth game that can be completed by running through a level and gunning down the enemy is contrary to the whole point of the genre.

Anthony: I think it was a mistake. I don't think the developer intended for you to be able to do that.

Paul: I agree with Ant, I think it was more of a design flaw than anything else. But *Hitman's* stealth elements are certainly a lot broader than something like *Splinter Cell*, which is pretty much all about hiding in shadows.

Anthony: Bollocks. *Hitman* doesn't offer nearly as complete

Another business trip from hell.

a stealth experience as *Splinter Cell*.

Paul: But in *Hitman*, at least you're not just completing levels by hiding in the dark.

Anthony: No, you're completing levels by dressing in other mens' trousers.

Paul: You can hide behind corners and wait for enemies to pass if you want to. There's a lot of freedom in how you can complete each level. I think there's a really definitive game in there struggling to get out.

Anthony: I only think there's freedom because *Hitman's* world is so unrealistic and the AI is so rubbish.

Martin: It's verging on idiotic.

Anthony: It *is* idiotic. People can be dancing in a meat-works while you're killing everyone around them, and they just keep on dancing like nothing is happening.

Paul: But you always have to think about the consequences of your actions, unlike in *Manhunt* where you're simply rewarded every time you brutally kill someone.

Anthony: But saying that, you're usually better off just killing everyone, otherwise they wake up and alert everyone else. It's really annoying, because out of all of these games, *Hitman* has probably got the best concept for a stealth game – being a paid assassin – but it just doesn't pull it off. Apart from the changing clothes bits, the rest of the gameplay hasn't evolved since *GoldenEye*.

Will: I like walking into a room and there's just a man standing there in his pants.

Martin: We can discuss your sexual preferences another time. *(Sniggers all round.)*

Will: The biggest flaw is that when you change into other people's clothes, you don't put a wig on. So there's always this suspicious bald guy walking around in different outfits and nobody ever suspects him.

Anthony: Yeah, I can just imagine a mission where Agent 47 has to infiltrate a heavy metal band and everyone else has long hair, apart from this one bald guy on drums. *(Laughter and nods of agreement from all.)*

Anthony: And how completely gratuitous is it with all of the so-called adult themes, which basically means strippers, hookers and bondage gear in every level?

Martin: Yeah, those are the bits I like…

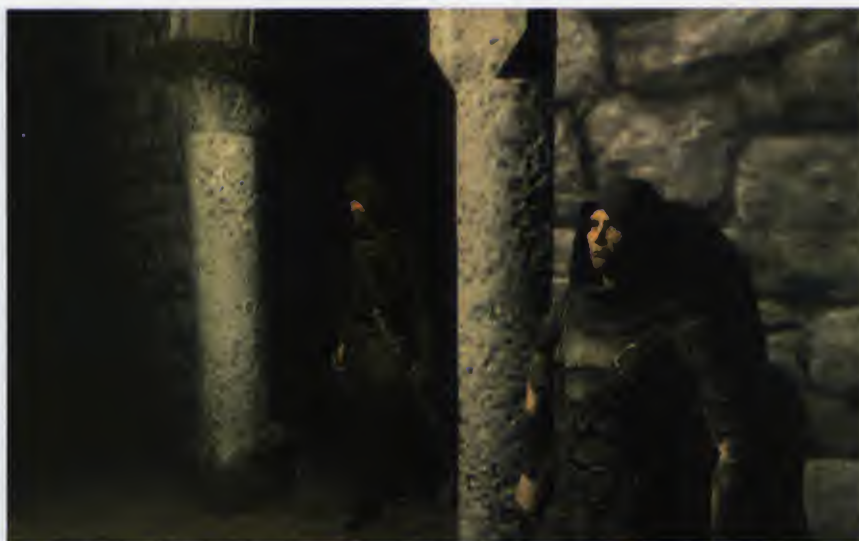## "It's got the best concept for a stealth game – being a paid assassin – but it doesn't work"

ANTHONY HOLDEN KNOWS THAT *HITMAN* TRIES, BUT FAILS

Get spotted in *Manhunt* and it's curtains.

"Now, which switch was it again?"

"Is that a sword in your pocket or are you just pleased to see me?"

"You can have too much freedom in a game, but *Thief* gives you the perfect amount"

UNLIKE WHAM!, **JAMIE SEFTON** WANTS HIS FREEDOM

MANHUNT

Will: It's an exercise in mediocrity and shitness. It's an empty shell, it's not even a game. You're forced to kill. Rubbish! Rubbish! Rubbish!

Martin: You don't like it?

Jamie: It's a game that splits people down the middle.

Martin: What, literally? *(Everyone laughs.)*

Jamie: It doesn't have anything you'd expect from a stealth game like climbing up pipes and walking across rooftops. All you do is hide in shadows, sneak around and kill people.

Will: All it involves is walking up behind someone and killing them from behind.

Martin: Yeah, but half of *Thief: Deadly Shadows* is about walking up behind someone and smacking them over the head.

Will: What I like about stealth games is that if you don't want to kill someone, usually you don't have to. But in *Manhunt*, you don't get that choice.

Martin: But the entire point of this game is to kill. Dodgy subject matter aside, there wouldn't even be a game there if you had the option not to kill. As a stealth game, it's pretty basic.

Jamie: It's all about the killing.

Anthony: I think Will is a bit odd: not killing anyone is boring.

Will: But at least *Thief* gives you the option to sneak past someone. *Manhunt* doesn't do that – the game mechanic is dull. It's got a good atmosphere and high production values, but I can't think of a more cynical cash-in. Its entire gameplay is based on controversy.

Anthony: They were courting controversy all the way to attract a more impressionable audience, which is why I can't defend it. In saying that though, it's no worse than a lot of films – and it was an 18 certificate.

Martin: But despite all of that, is it a good stealth game?

Anthony: No.

Will: No.

Paul: Yes. I mean no.

Jamie: There's less stealth the further into the game you get, and eventually you just end up walking around shooting people.

Anthony: They couldn't even make the stealth game last through the whole game.

Martin: The stealth system is ridiculous. You can have someone standing right next to you and they don't see you because you're partially hidden in a shadow.

Jamie: In that way, it's like *Metal Gear*: it shouts that it's a videogame. You have a little icon that tells you when you're hidden.

Anthony: But you'd never get situations in *Metal Gear* where people would be literally breathing in your face and still not see you.

Jamie: Plus, the controls are terrible. As a stealth game, it's not a patch on any other here.

Anthony: It's the worst stealth game here by far.

THIEF: DEADLY SHADOWS

Will: In terms of simple stealth, it has the best stealth here. But it's very flawed too.

Paul: I'll give you a good example of that. The developer claimed you'd be able to walk around the city and break into any house you wanted. You can't. You can wander around four, small city-themed levels and break into a few buildings.

Martin: It was originally supposed to be a PC game with a fully freeform element, where you could break into anywhere and take on different quests. But then it was redesigned and dumbed down.

Jamie: It should have been like *GTA*.

Anthony: It was almost the greatest stealth game ever made.

Will: It'll probably say that on its gravestone.

Paul: When it does work, it works really well. In all the levels where you have to go in and find something, you're just sent in and left to work out the whole place by yourself.

Will: All you have is a hand-drawn map with only a rough indication of where the thing you're looking for is.

Anthony: The hand-drawn map is genius. It gives you just about enough information to start you off, and a rough idea of where the object you're looking for is. But eventually, you just have to go and search for it yourself.

Jamie: I think you can give too much freedom in a game, but *Thief* gives you just about the perfect amount.

Anthony: You're never just getting from A to B in a mission like you are in *Splinter Cell*. The levels are more three-dimensional and allow you to go anywhere you want to.

Martin: In that sense, it's keeping very much in line with the first two *Thief* games. And when it's tense, it's almost unbearably tense. But, when someone sees you, I find it ludicrous that you can just run into a different loading zone and they won't follow you.

Anthony: I hate that too.

Will: Although, when you climb up a wall with the climbing gloves, the enemy will stand underneath you and say things like, 'You can't stay up there forever you taffer', and either wait for you to come down or go and get some more of their mates.

Martin: And the guards have a good selection of dialogue too. They're not always saying the same old phrases.

Will: There's so much dialogue recorded, so you never get bored with it.

Anthony: But the pacing of the game is all wrong.

Martin: It's just all stealth, stealth and more stealth. The first two were like that too, and you can't afford to get into a fight because you're a complete wuss and almost always lose.

Anthony: The AI is very good in some situations – probably the best here. But there are still some massive flaws with it. You can still work your way through each level, clearing it of enemies as you go. So if there's just one guard left in the entire building, as long as he doesn't see a body, he'll just wander around an empty house.

Will: Still, if you're a PC gamer with any interest in stealth games, you have to play this.

Anthony: Definitely. And the reason we're getting so angry about it is because it's so achingly close to brilliance. PCZ

A scene played out in UK town centres every Saturday night.

AND THE WINNER IS... SPLINTER CELL

SPLINTER CELL STEALS TOP SPOT...

Splinter Cell's perfect pacing and lifelike atmosphere made it our stealth game of choice.

The closest Supertest result for a while, the panel was torn between the two stealth behemoths *Splinter Cell* and *Thief: Deadly Shadows*. Eventually though, it was *Splinter Cell* that narrowly snuck away with the top prize.

Jamie's reason for choosing *Splinter Cell* was simple. "It really blew me away," he enthused. "The whole atmosphere was brilliant." As for Anthony: "I'd love to choose *Pandora Tomorrow* because of the multiplayer, but I can't – it's not the total package. *Splinter Cell* is still the most polished, well-paced PC stealth game there is."

Meanwhile, Paul almost chose *Hitman* over his eventual winner *Thief: Deadly Shadows*, which he picked because: "It grabbed me more than any of the others." Will surprised everyone by choosing *Splinter Cell* over *Thief*. His reason? "It's the definitive stealth package." Martin also went for Sam Fisher's first adventure, saying: "Nothing comes close to *Splinter Cell*'s brilliant pacing."

OUR VERDICT

THE SCORES ON THE DOORS

JURY	WINNER (2PTS)	RUNNER UP (1PT)
PAUL	THIEF: DEADLY SHADOWS	HITMAN: CONTRACTS
WILL	SPLINTER CELL	THIEF: DEADLY SHADOWS
JAMIE	SPLINTER CELL	THIEF: DEADLY SHADOWS
ANTHONY	SPLINTER CELL	THIEF: DEADLY SHADOWS
MARTIN	SPLINTER CELL	THIEF: DEADLY SHADOWS

POSITION	GAME	POINTS
1ST	SPLINTER CELL	8 PTS
2ND	THIEF: DEADLY SHADOWS	6 PTS
3RD	HITMAN: CONTACTS	1 PTS
4TH	SPLINTER CELL: PANDORA TOMORROW	0 PTS
4TH	MANHUNT	0 PTS

OVER TO YOU

THE PEOPLE HAVE SPOKEN AND THE VOTES ARE IN

Thief: Deadly Shadows just nicks it from Splinter Cell.

This is the bit where you get to contribute to the discussion and have your say on what game you think should have won. If you'd like to take part in the next Supertest, just log on to www.pczone.co.uk and register your vote. Many thanks if you posted comments this time around. Here are just a small selection...

I love *Splinter Cell*. *Pandora Tomorrow* seemed dumbed down, and I love the bastard-hardness of the first one.
moomoocow8 is a *Splinter Cell* purist

Thief 3 is the pinnacle of these stealth games. You actually have to think about stealth rather than solving puzzles, like in *Splinter Cell*.
TheTingler thinks *Thief* is the king of the stealthers

Thief: Deadly Shadows is a great game, and you can get through every level without getting into any confrontations, which is great. The feeling of stealing something from under someone's nose and then sneaking past them on your way out is so nice.
spudy2000 is a pure crim at heart

READER VOTES

🟥	THIEF: DEADLY SHADOWS	37.5%
🟨	SPLINTER CELL	34%
🟦	SPLINTER CELL: PANDORA TOMORROW	19%
🟧	MANHUNT	9.5%
🟪	HITMAN: CONTRACTS	0%

You'll Need Mental Stamina Before, During & After The Match.

Total Club Manager is the first game where you have complete control on and off the pitch using the new 3D Match Engine and Interactive Manager Dugout. You'll need strategy and quick thinking to pick and train your team using the most up to date stats, and then manage them during the 90 minutes that really count. Can your most important muscle go the distance?   easports.co.uk/totalclubmanager

It's in the game.

ONLINE ZONE

FANTASY FOOTBALL

CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER ONLINE MOVES THE GOALPOSTS

BLJATLH 'E' YLMEV
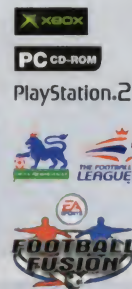
■ **ONLINE EDITOR:** Paul Presley

▲ Another month, another MMOG cancellation. Remember the Curse Of Zone we mentioned recently? The one that condemned *Warhammer Online* to an early death? Well, you may remember us quoting the team at Codemasters stating that fellow Brit-MMOG *Dragon Empires* was "firmly on track". Heh, funny story...

You'll have seen the news about *DE's* cancellation no doubt, and you'll have gazed skywards, rolled your eyes and given in to the crushing inevitability of it all.

But as one door closes, another opens. As we went to press, the announcement of the missing piece of the over-milked franchise-based MMOG puzzle heaved into view. The *Star Trek* universe is soon to become a virtual home for Klingon wannabes – and after all, aren't we all living in one global nerd-filled village these days?

Maybe it's a British thing. While Americans, Koreans and even Norwegians seem to turn these things out in their sleep, we can't seem to latch on to the formula that makes them stick till launch.

It's probably those high numbers that publishers start bandying about when talking development costs. As Brits, all you have to do is mention a sum over £32.50 and we get dizzy. We start worrying about how much it'll cost when things go wrong and how embarrassed we'll be. Not that that's a good enough reason – the England football team don't seem to mind.

Anyway, for an example of how to overcome a shaky beginning and how commitment to your product will see you through in the end, take a look at the open beta for *Neocron 2* on this month's cover DVD. You'll have to register at www.neocron.com to get started, and if you happen to be a UK developer, take some notes...

▼

SOMETHING of a holy grail in the world of online gaming, a massively multiplayer football management game would appear to be a 'no-brainer'. Everybody knows what football is, not everybody knows what an orc is. Yet while subscription-paying goblin-worriers proliferate across the earth, Massively Multiplayer Online Football Management Games (MMOFMG) are either homespun non-commercial affairs or high-profile failures. And with *Sky Sports Football Manager* developer/partner HotGen Studios having its fingers burned to the tune of £3m a couple of years ago, publisher wariness is understandable.

However, Eidos owns the biggest name in the business, and seems

"Champions! Champions!"

determined to use it. With start-up developer Beautiful Game Studios currently putting the finishing touches to *Championship Manager 5*, Eidos chose the EGN tradeshow to announce the standalone accompaniment, *CM Online*.

DREAM TEAM?

Developed by Swedish outfit Jadestone – 'in conjunction with Beautiful Game Studios' – the game's set for a January 2005 release. Jadestone president Robert Henrysson comments: "Today marks a giant step for us: we get to venture out on something new, taking what we know about football management simulations and running online games, and harmonising it with the great strength of the *Champ Man* brand."

Cynics may claim that the *CM* brand has just been tagged on to an existing game to fox an already confused public, and that it's only a matter of time before we see *Champ Man Karting Extreme*. However, said game does come with a

Can you beat Wenger, Ferguson and Mourinho at their own game?

The forum can help you out with any *CM Online* queries.
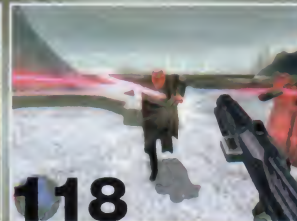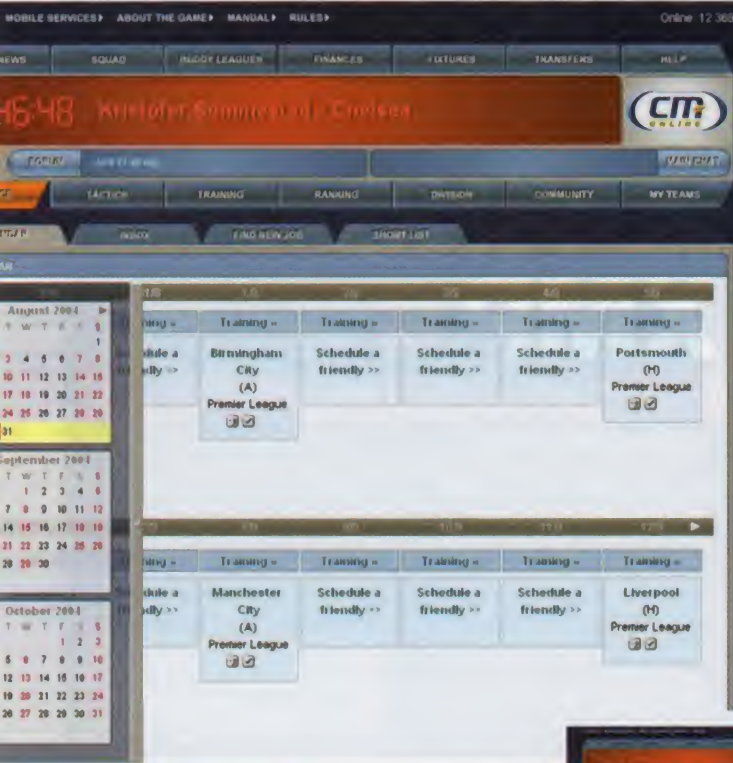
sizeable heritage, having existed in some form on the Internet since 1999, going by the name *Football Manager*. To confuse things further, this is the name chosen by original *Champ Man* developer Sports Interactive for its new game.

CM Online is set to follow a similar format to the failed *Sky Sports Football Manager*, with a number of worlds, each populated by player-controlled clubs – initially from England, Scotland, Italy, Spain, Germany and France.

The key difference is that there will be no attempt to play out matches in real-time. Instead, generic match tactics will be set, the servers will close down at midnight to calculate the matches and you can then watch them in full the next morning from any PC in the world. What's more, you can even have info sent to your mobile phone: ur a sht mngr. If you fancy swapping goblins for goalposts, we'll have more news as kick-off approaches.

■ **Publisher:** Eidos
■ **Developer:** Jadestone
■ **ETA:** January 2005
■ **Website:** www.cm-online.com

"Today marks a giant step for us, we get to venture out on something new"

ROBERT HENRYSSON, PRESIDENT, JADESTONE

Six leagues are on offer.

A statistician's dream.

Play For Pay With 4K

IT'S LIKE *POP IDOL*, BUT WITH *DOOM 3* INSTEAD OF SIMON COWELL

This could be you.

Play *Doom 3* for fame and glory.

Compete in events around the world.

EVER WISHED YOUR *Doom 3* skills could be seen on the wider stage? Wished you could be properly rewarded? Wished for the fame and fortune that comes with being among the best gamers in the world? Have 4Kings Intel got a prize for you!

Throughout October, November and December, the leading UK gaming clan is hosting a series of online qualifiers to find its *Doom 3* team for 2005. Online specialist Jolt is running the events, with the top players making it through to a grand LAN final in early December.

The eventual victors will be offered a full year-long contract with the 4Kings team (who have been supported by the good folk at Intel for the best part of two years now), which will see them playing in major world tournaments throughout 2005.

Full details of the qualifying events can be found by heading over to www.four-kings.com and www.jolt.co.uk. Be warned though: the standard of play being asked for is extremely high, as anyone who's ever seen the 4Kers on one of our Fight Club nights will testify. Good luck!

WEBGAME OF THE MONTH

WHY PAY TO PLAY WHEN THE INTERWEB PROVIDES FUN FOR FREE?

Time to brush up on Jung.

DIE ANSTALT
(WWW.PARAPLUESCH.DE)

I had a friend once who attended therapy sessions following what he described as "a recurring dream about being shrunk to microscopic proportions". He nearly went bankrupt spending one Wednesday a month lying on a plush leather couch and talking about his mother to a complete stranger whose only contribution to the process was to say, "what do you think that means?" whenever he was asked for an explanation.

I could have saved them both a lot of bother by owning up to sawing two inches off the bottom of his chair and table legs one afternoon. The last I heard he'd taken to wearing top hats and seven-inch platforms and was about to be cast off to the loony bin. Hey ho. Funny old world…

Anyway, I only mention it as I had a chance recently to exorcise some of my own therapist-wannabe demons thanks to a German site called Die Anstalt (The Institute). The premise is that several sweet-as-heck cuddly toys have developed 'issues' following owner abandonment, and need curing. As the psychiatrist, you're given several analytical paths to choose from, taking in dream therapy, drugs, visual stimuli and counselling. The trick is working out what method is best in any given situation, as it's all too easy to take a wrong turning and make the situation worse than ever. Which is obviously the most fun path…

Anybody seen the electrodes?

CLAN DIARY

SCEE

ANNE ROGERS, aka Jaffy
www.scee-clan.co.uk

This month has seen plenty of changes in the SCEE camp. With our post-ESWC squad almost finalised, we took on Danish trialist Star. With previous ECG and Cyber-X Games experience in other international LAN events, she should certainly be a great asset to the team.

Women playing games are hard to find, let alone women with talent! Having to source players from Europe is common, as the UK female *Counter-Strike* community is rather small. As you might imagine, this in turn makes attending LAN events difficult. However, the number of women playing games is increasing rapidly, so things look promising for the future. Let's hope we see more females at LAN events this coming year, in all-female or mixed teams.

Mixed teams can be great fun. Although not true of all men, most tend to have a very different style of play to women. They welcome the rush tactic, while women prefer to take things more slowly and cautiously. Of course, this is a gross

"Men welcome the rush tactic, while women prefer to take things more slowly"

The intense training pays off.

generalisation, but mixed teams make a welcome change in style of play.

I recently competed in Multiplay UK's i21 LAN event in Newbury, in the World Cyber Games UK preliminaries. The clan, Immortal Technique, have qualified for the WCG UK finals at Earls Court, London. While taking time to go to LAN events without SCEE improves your game skills immensely, it can be difficult for the clan. However, we come back as stronger players, so it's definitely worth it.

The SCEE training schedule is now set on training a new map every week. To do this, we take one tactic, and stick to it all evening in every practice match, until it's perfected. While this can be incredibly dull, it needs to be done, and we've found it to be a truly efficient method of training.

Finally, with our old game server not meeting our requirements, we recently gained the support of #reload-network (on Quakenet IRC), who's provided us with a smashing public server. Come on to #scee channel on Quakenet sometime, say hello and have a game with us!

The *UT2004* technology allows for huge maps.   **Not a direct *XMP* port, but it's based on the original.**

MONKEYING WITH XMP

RIDICULOUSLY POPULAR MOD GETS *UT2004* MAKEOVER

WHEN LEGEND Entertainment went the way of the dodo at the start of this year, fans of *XMP*, the popular *Unreal II* multiplayer total conversion feared the worst. No more support for the classy mod?

Luckily, all is not lost. Free Monkey Interactive, a team of experienced mod developers (including those responsible for the *XMP* Community Bonus Pack) has picked up the gauntlet and is on the verge of releasing a *UT2004* version

of the classic *XMP* gameplay.

UT XMP is a combination of the spirit that made the original *XMP* such a worthwhile experience, with the speed, power and visual enhancements offered by the *UT2004* engine, along with plenty of original content. An exact conversion isn't possible due to Atari still holding the rights to *XMP* content, but the nature of the gameplay can still be matched byte for byte.

All things being equal, we should have the full mod on next issue's cover discs. In the meantime (with thanks to Jaybo at ClanBase), this month's discs contain promotional trailers and in-game movies, showing off the action in all its *UT2004*-enhanced glory. Enjoy!
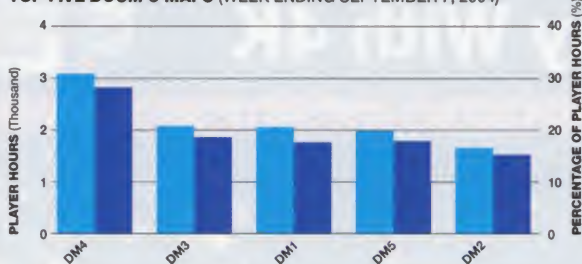
■ **Publisher:** n/a
■ **Developer:** Free Monkey Int
■ **ETA:** Out Now
■ **Website:** www.free-monkey.com

STATZONE

A LOOK AT THE DATA SHAPING YOUR ONLINE WORLD

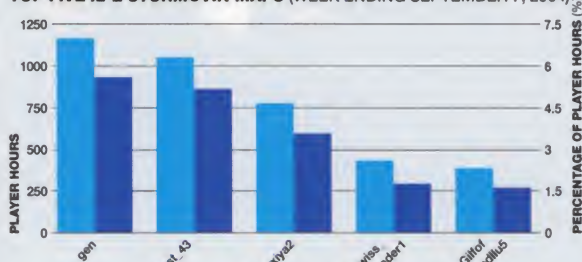ALL DATA SUPPLIED BY: **CSPORTS:net**

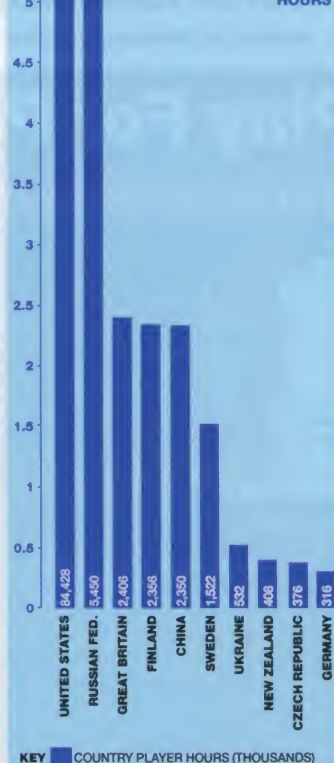### TOP FIVE *DOOM 3* MAPS (WEEK ENDING SEPTEMBER 7, 2004)

KEY ■ PLAYER HOURS   ■ PERCENTAGE OF PLAYER HOURS

TOP FIVE *IL-2 STURMOVIK* MAPS (WEEK ENDING SEPTEMBER 7, 2004)

KEY ■ PLAYER HOURS   ■ PERCENTAGE OF PLAYER HOURS

TOP TEN COUNTRIES PLAYING MULTI THEFT AUTO (WEEK ENDING SEPTEMBER 7, 2004)
COUNTRY PLAYER HOURS

UNITED STATES	84,428
RUSSIAN FED.	5,450
GREAT BRITAIN	2,406
FINLAND	2,356
CHINA	2,350
SWEDEN	1,522
UKRAINE	532
NEW ZEALAND	408
CZECH REPUBLIC	376
GERMANY	316

KEY ■ COUNTRY PLAYER HOURS (THOUSANDS)

> "There's this painting from the 1600s of these men on a boat with waves crashing all over them. It's very stylistic and epic, which is what we're all about"
>
> CHRIS SIGATY, *WORLD OF WARCRAFT*

WELCOME TO MY WORLD...

Chris Sigaty – World Of Warcraft

THERE'S JUST something about *World Of Warcraft*. Whenever you see a screenshot, you just know that it couldn't possibly be from any other game. Perhaps it's the bright colours – a few shades off being garish – that give the environments a slightly comic-book feel. It's certainly something that Chris Sigaty, producer on *WOW*, is musing about.

"Our artists took a while to come up with the style, then they had an epiphany," Chris explains. "There's something about the proportions in the game, the art and the style that's reflected in everything. It's very unique. You could break it down and say this is snow, or this is desert, but everything has a particular flavour and character which you don't see in other MMORPGs."

WOW might be stylish, with its epic landscapes that stretch from snow-capped mountain ranges to parched

deserts, but it certainly isn't particularly realistic. As far as Chris is concerned though, there's no reason why it should have to be.

"There was a great post in one of our forums where someone was arguing against *WOW*, saying that realism in a MMORPG was better. One guy defended us by posting up two pictures. One was a photo of these two German guys on a raft going down a river, and it was very realistic. The other was a painting from the 1600s of men on a boat with waves crashing all over them. It was stylistic and epic, which is what we're all about."

When it comes to being epic, the *WOW* team has a lot to draw from. Much of the inspiration for the environments and details in the game have been taken from *Warcraft III*. "The team has done a fantastic job on it," enthuses Chris, who was also the producer on *WC3*.

"There was this very established universe to work from, and they've done so many things where they've captured the character of that world. For example, in *WC3* you fight these creatures called the Narga, which are these lizard-mermaid creatures. You learn that they're related in some way to the night elves. In the game, when the night elves swim, they do so in this very serpentine way. It's a really subtle thing, but having all this rich, rich detail in the background allows for little things like that to be put in."

And as any devotee of Blizzard's previous titles will tell you, it's the little things that make the games the classics they are. *WOW* looks set to join them. PZ

■ **Publisher:** VU Games	■ **Developer:** Blizzard
■ **ETA:** TBC	■ **Website:** www.blizzard.com/wow

Cities spring up around the chariot stops. Fortunately, the 'inner city bus centre' feel doesn't extend as far as the rank smell of piss-soaked tramps.

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER eGenesis
PUBLISHER eGenesis
WEBSITE www.atitd2.com
ETA Autumn 2004

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- New tale set in ancient Egypt
- New tests and challenges
- City and rural areas with new environmental textures
- More in-game events run by a team of players

CV

EGENESIS

eGenesis is an indy development studio based in Pennsylvania, specialising in MMORPG development. *ATITD* is its first commercial game and it took five people six years to put together...

2003 *A Tale In The Desert* – adventures in ancient Egypt in this non-combat MMORPG based around creativity and community. Surprisingly, baking bricks and carving planks proved to be as addictive as killing monsters – even Steve Hill signed up.

Kicking up a sandstorm...
A TALE IN THE DESERT 2

Rhianna Pratchett dusts off her well-worn sandals, brushes up on her hieroglyphs and heads back in time

THE WORLD OF MMOGs is dominated by the same few big names, stoically doing their thing and backed by big money. So when one comes along that's a complete breath of fresh air *and* is self-published (and surviving that way), it makes a refreshing change. That's just what happened with the original *A Tale In The Desert*, the non-combat online adventure based entirely in ancient Egypt.

As a premise, I admit it sounds slightly insane – and if I hadn't spent many nights happily experimenting with scarab beetle breeding, weaving flax and worrying whether my camels were getting enough to eat, I'd be concerned that this was some kind of *Myst*-style adventure with a few pyramids thrown in. But instead, it turned out to be an incredibly original experience, with many innovative ideas – not to mention being an interesting experiment in virtual social anthropology.

Unlike other online games, *ATITD* was never meant to go on and on. Right from the start, it was thought that the game was a proper 'game', with a very definite beginning, middle and end, perpetuated by the challenges that eGenesis would reveal to its players. A year-and-a-half later, the original game is wrapping up and players are preparing to face new challenges in the Second Telling, *ATITD2*.

SAME BUT DIFFERENT

Although you're still in the same game world, with many of the same building materials around and basic creation systems, the main difference in *Tale 2* is that there's much more of a town-and-

Compounds can be extended as much as space will allow.

"The main difference in *A Tale In The Desert 2* is that it has a much more town-and-country feel"

Camels are back, but you still can't ride them. They've got the hump.

Hi ho-tep, hi ho-tep, it's off to work we go-tep! Mining, Egyptian style.

Running on roads is now thankfully twice as fast.

country feel. This is achieved in two remarkably simple but hugely effective ways. The first is by making players build their various implements for doing things (like flax weaving, brick-making or carpentry) inside compounds, which you can also customise.

The second way is by creating a new travel system for the game, done by allowing players to run twice as fast on roads and locations called chariot stops. These depart every ten minutes or so and mean you can instantaneously travel to other parts of Egypt for free. You can see compounds springing up all around these chariot stops already in the beta, creating a more town-like feel, which is just what eGenesis intended.

COUNTRY LIFE

Of course, there's still going to be the vast wide open areas that characterised the first game, where you could run through the quiet depths of an ancient land with the setting sun on your back, a pocket full of mushrooms and not see a soul. And when you did see someone, you'd greet each other cheerfully, exchange acrobatic moves and petition signatures and carry on running. No elves, no goblins. It was incredibly peaceful.

The developer has implemented a new vegetation system in the game too, which gives players 200,000 unique trees and plants to experiment with. You can chop them up, use them to build with or make interesting lotions, potions and tasty stews.

What's more, as well as new colours and textures that help bring the landscape to life, *ATITD2* also boasts new sound elements, which means that this time around, all your actions have accompanying sound. This is a real bonus and enlivens the game no end.

One of the most interesting challenges in this new incarnation is the new mining system. Previously, you had to earn the skills that would allow you to dowse for certain types of ores – iron being the easiest to find and ores like zinc being much harder. Once you'd located some ore, you had to build a mine and start digging the ore up.

This time around, there are no ore seams and you can build mines wherever you want. Instead of digging up ore, you dig up ore stones, which are covered in coloured and patterned crystals. When

melted down, different combinations of these crystals give you metal. After that, you have the dubious experimental fun of finding out which combinations produce what. It may sound rather complicated, but *ATITD* players tend to relish challenges – you can bet that corners of the Web will be filling up with tables and charts in no time.

ANY OLD IRON

What you do with the metal itself is determined by your skill and experience. First there's the anvil skill, which basically involves dropping a hunk of metal onto an anvil and bashing it with a couple of hammers until you get the shape you want. The closer you get it to the desired shape, the better quality the item will be – and yes, it is as tricky as it sounds.

Finally, *ATITD2* boasts additions such as an events manager and team to schedule in-game events for players, such as festivals and trade fairs (which proved popular in the first game). Couple this with new tests and challenges, and the Second Telling is shaping up to be every bit as absorbing as the first. PCZ

You'll develop a love of heavy metal.

Art is still alive and well in Egypt.

Rocket feud...

VENDETTA ONLINE

Richie Shoemaker watches from the launch pad as another space MMOG heads for the stars

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Guild Software
PUBLISHER TBA
WEBSITE www.vendetta-online.com
ETA Out Now (European release TBA)

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- We love space combat
- Controls systems cater for both the novice and the hardcore space jock
- Colourful graphics and clear interface
- Highly customisable spacecraft

The biggest lens flare in the universe.

Ship designs are highly, um, functional.

I think I can see Uranus.

IT'S A common story: four friends with a love of games decide to get together and share their vision with the world. In the case of the unknown quartet who've called themselves Guild Software, the dream wasn't to create some acid-drenched homage to *Pac-Man* or mash together yet another rendition of *Space Invaders*, but to craft a fully-realised 3D universe populated by spaceships, big rocks and thousands of players. As a test-the-water debut, games don't come any more ambitious than *Vendetta Online*.

Set entirely in space, *Vendetta* follows in the grand tradition of *Elite*, *Privateer* and *X-Beyond The Frontier*, where you begin with a basic ship, a small amount of cash and a view to becoming either the richest or most notorious pilot in the galaxy. This is achieved either by buying and trading or simply by killing other ships. The main difference between this and the once-common space combat game is that rather than playing alone,

Vendetta Online offers over 7000 solar systems to explore and potentially even more players to play alongside.

Against *EVE Online*, *Vendetta's* scope for adventure is initially more limited, with only trade, contract missions and combat offered as viable in-game careers. Mining, manufacturing and station management are all planned as later additions.

THE JOY OF STICKS

Despite this the game appears to offer a much greater degree of accessibility than *EVE*, with a simple flight interface and clear and colourful graphics. (Although, much of the ease of play may be down to the fact that the universe is still a lot less established and competitive.)

Vendetta will at least feature a proper combat/flight model, one that could see that dusty old joystick coming out of retirement. Yes space fans, *Vendetta* allows
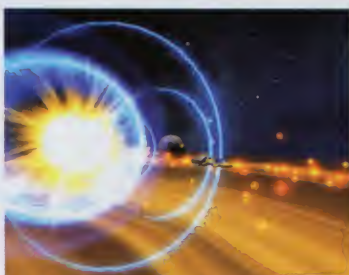
In space, no one can hear you ROFL.

you to control your ship directly. Much as we enjoy *EVE's* RTS-style point-and-clickery, as true pilots we like to feel the vacuum of space on our cheeks and a joystick throbbing against our thighs (*Speak for yourself –Ed*).

BLAST OFF

With the slow demise of EA's *Earth & Beyond* and games like *Jumpgate* closing in on their twilight years, space-based multiplayer gaming really could do with a boost right now. And despite its low key launch and bargain bin origins, *Vendetta* could be the game to provide it.

Could, that is, if the game can get itself set up on this side of the Atlantic. Currently on release in North America, there are no firm plans to bring the game to Europe until next year at the earliest. However, we're assured the client software will be made available to download and the game will be available to play across the US server. If so, you can expect a review very soon and maybe even the software on a future *PC ZONE* cover disc.

Some space diamonds, yesterday.

The Zen rock gardens of Kygon 4.

Become a space brigand *and* learn the intricacies of a free-market economy...

CORONER'S DEPT.

RANK: Major

NAME: Mayhem

CAUSE OF DEATH:
Moron behind the
keyboard activated
his flashlight
instead of his
rocket launcher
in the middle of
a firefight.

WITHOUT A ZBOARD, YOU'RE TOAST.

IN A GAME LIKE DOOM 3™, YOU HAVE TO MOVE FAST OR DIE. THAT'S WHY YOU NEED ZBOARD™. THE WORLD'S FIRST INTERCHANGEABLE CUSTOM KEYBOARD SYSTEM. ZBOARD'S LIMITED EDITION DOOM 3 KEYBOARD IS CUSTOMIZED FOR YOU TO CHANGE WEAPONS FAST. RELOAD, OR JUST GET THE HELL OUT OF THE WAY. NO MORE FUMBLING THROUGH MANUALS OR DROPPING GRENADES WHEN YOU SHOULD BE CROUCHING. WITH ZBOARD'S CUSTOM GRAPHICS AND LABELED COMMANDS, IT'S ALL RIGHT THERE IN FRONT OF YOU. IF YOU'RE LOOKING FOR AN EDGE IN DOOM 3, CHECK OUT ZBOARD.COM FOR MORE DETAILS.

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WIN THE ULTIMATE GAMING PC UPGRADE KIT!

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Fancy turning your PC into a lean, mean fighting machine, making you the envy of all your friends? Read on...

PCZONE

WIN BIG PRIZES!!

FAR CRY MAP-MAKING CONTEST

FAR CRY – what a game, eh? Near perfect, a work of design genius, expertly crafted in every respect. Bet you can do better though...

We've teamed up with Ubisoft to celebrate the release of the Far Cry modding tools, in what must surely be the ultimate map-making contest in, oh I dunno, the history of time itself!

The concept couldn't be easier. Using either the in-game map editor or

the widely available Far Cry SDK tools, just put together the best damned multiplayer or single-player map you can. Ubisoft will choose the best five, then the expert Far Cry judging panel at ZONE (ie Will) plan to scrutinise every last pixel and decide on the ultimate winner and two runners-up.

What do you get for your efforts? Why, only everything you could possibly need to upgrade your PC into the best

gaming machine for miles around, that's what! The winner will get his or her hands on £1,400 worth of hardware and a Deluxe Edition copy of Far Cry! That's a top-of-the-range AMD Athlon 64 FX-55 processor, an NVIDIA GeForce 6800GT video card, a Gigabyte K8NSNXP-939 motherboard, a Hiper Power PSU and 2GB of Kingston Technology HyperX DDR 400MHz memory modules! The two runners-up will both receive a 6800GT

video card and a Deluxe Edition copy of Far Cry. Resident ZONE hardware guru Phil 'Wandy' Wand was heard to say, "Cripes!" when told of the prize.

Remember, you've got just two months to get your maps made and sent off to Ubisoft (see the rules above for exact details), so get cracking! We'll be looking for originality, attention to detail, execution and just plain excitement. Go on, thrill us!

Be creative! *Far Cry* is about more than just jungles.
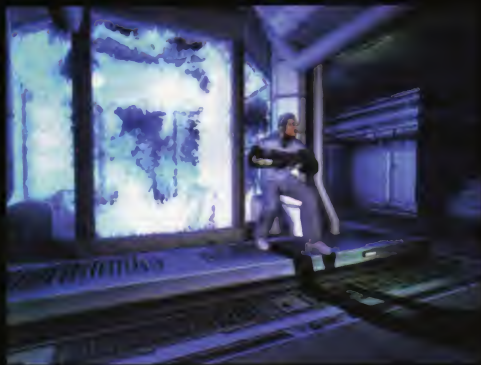
Make sure you use the NPC AI to its fullest.
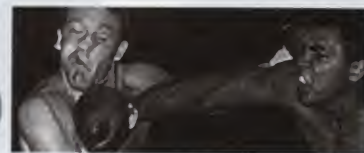

Multiplayer and single-player maps are allowed.

FIGHT CLUB

FIRST RULE OF FIGHT CLUB: *PC ZONE* OWNZ JØØ
FIGHT CLUB MODERATORS: METALFACE, REX MUNDI & GOWERLY

Last time out, it was a cracking Fight Club (if a little understaffed), with *UT2004* taking centre stage and Onslaught providing most of the action. Although the *ZONE* crew was thin on the ground (just Prezzer, Filby and Gowerly being able to make up the numbers), we showed our mettle, fought like demons and, naturally, lost big time.

■ But with opposition like -UGC-guy_b, Caff, Dredj, MR_Kazoo (who had the misfortune to be repeatedly slaughtered by Prezzer during a particularly lucky streak) and DAN_PRO, we were never going to stand much of a chance. These star players were also joined by your_starlight and Fnaa, who also provided most of the screenshots of the night's action you see on these pages. Many thanks if you took part.

■ Now, a request from our beloved admin chaps. We've noticed that there's been a bit of a drop off in activity on our regular *UT2004* server, so we'd like to address that by giving you guys the chance to have a say. Is there a particular total conversion that you'd like to see us host? Got the hots for a special little mod? Send your requests to online.zone@pczone.co.uk and we'll do our best to support the most popular.

■ As always, to take part in Fight Club, or to find the connection details for all our public game servers, get over to www.zonegames.co.uk for the full skinny. Hop to it!

COME & 'AVE A GO!
www.zonegames.co.uk
for all the info

WHO'S WHO	
Dave Woods	Kid Unknown
Jamie Sefton	NorthernScum
Paul Presley	Prezzer
Will Porter	Batsphinx
Suzy Wallace	Uzibat
Anthony Holden	Shokupan
Jamie Malcolm	JimLad
Martin Korda	Nameless One
Phil Wand	Wandy
Michael Filby	Parallax

UPCOMING FIGHT CLUB EVENTS

THURSDAY NOVEMBER 4
6.30pm - 9.00pm
BF1942: Desert Combat

THURSDAY DECEMBER 2
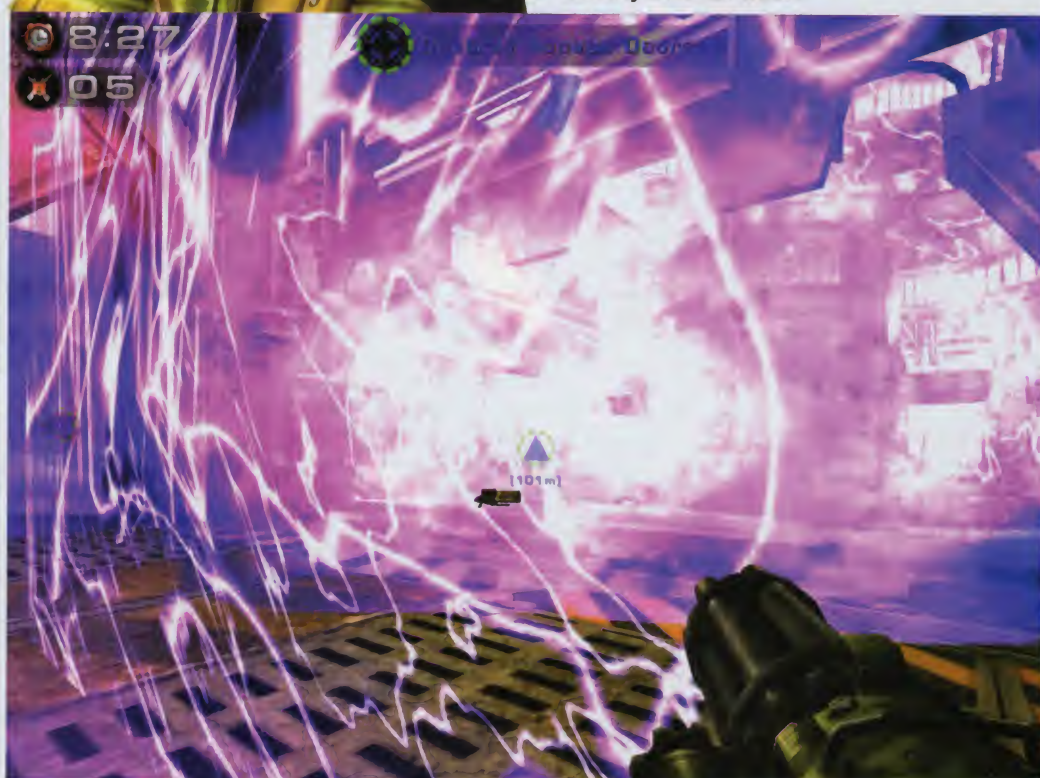6.30pm - 9.00pm
Counter-Strike: Source

Gowerly meets his demise.

Your_starlight gets serious.

Prezzer's life flashes before his eyes.

Giving Jean Michelle Jarre a run for his money.

ZONECHAT

WHERE THE WORLD AND HIS WIFE COME TO TALK GAMES...

The Prezzer & Will Show

MORE like the Prezzer & Friends show last time, with Will being away on his hols, but his shoes were ably filled by both editor Dave 'Don't mention *Quake IV*' Woods, associate editor Jamie 'How much?' Sefton and regular chat visitor Phil 'Wandy' Wand for the evening's festivities.

Aside from trying desperately not to reveal last month's rip-roaring *Quake IV* exclusive ahead of time, most of the night was taken up with discussions on *Halo 2*'s 'I Love Bees' viral marketing campaign, the pre-loading fun of this month's star game, *Half-Life 2*, and the state of MMOGs today.

Indeed, MMOGs provided the evening's competition, with Fyska walking away with a handsome bundle of *Anarchy Online: Alien Invasion*, an *AO* t-shirt, the *AO* soundtrack CD and

a copy of *The Longest Journey* – all thanks to our good friends as Funcom.

The next *ZONE* Chat takes place on Wednesday, November 3 at the regular time of 5-7pm. To take part, log in to #pcz on the Quakenet IRC server. No doubt we'll all be discussing the highs and, er, highs of *Half-Life 2* (see our review on page 58). We'll also have our usual fabulous competitions, chats about the world of gaming and, in what we hope will be a regular series, a page-by-page look at the new issue and what you think about it.

To join in, just grab a copy of mIRC from www.mirc.com, log on to irc.uk.quakenet.org and type /join #pcz to enter the *PC ZONE* channel. The channel's open 24/7 incidentally, so you needn't wait for us to turn up if you want to mix and mingle with the readers of your favourite gaming mag!

WEDNESDAY NOVEMBER 3 5.00PM –7.00PM

LAN ROVER

STEVE 'SCALPER' RANDALL CHECKS OUT THE EVENTS UP AND DOWN THE COUNTRY YOU COULD WELL LAN-D UP IN THIS MONTH...

■ With nights hitting earlier, why not enjoy the heat of a whole bunch of machines in one small room? Take lots of liquid as it's almost a rule that you must drink at a LAN party, or you get no respect for winning.

■ October 29-31 has the only event to be at, my 50-seater GGLAN event. I'll be hosting three days of mayhem and prizes in Mile End, London. £20 per head if you pay before the end of Sept, £30 thereafter. For more, www.gglan.co.uk or leave a post on the forum.

■ Over the same weekend, there are 40 places in the eighth Wolflan event in Mansfield. For info on the prizes and tournaments, visit www.wolflan.com.

■ www.centralanuk.co.uk is also holding its third event from October 29-31. 50 players will be heading to Bagnall in Staffordshire,

clutching £25 in their sweaty hands. Probably.
■ Bad Lan Rising is holding Event 16 on October 15-17 at the Marton Hotel & Country Club in Middlesbrough. There's space for 180, with the first 100 players getting their own dog tags. More details: www.badlanrising.com.
■ November 5-7 has the last www.clanlan.net event of the year in St Helens, Merseyside.
■ Finally, a double plug for the www.thefragfactory.co.uk events of October 9-10, and then again on November 20-21 at the Barnsley Community centre. If you pre-book, it'll cost you £25 each for up to 45 people.
■ That's all for this month folks. If you want your party to feature here, drop me a line with at least two months advance notice, the details of numbers, costs and location at scalper@gglan.co.uk. Scalper out.

GUILDHALL

▲ WHEN A FIRM HANDSHAKE ISN'T ENOUGH

Missing a vital member for a top-ranking *Quake* clan? Want to find a group of gaming mates to play *Dark Age Of Camelot* together? Guildhall is your one-stop recruitment shop for online gaming gangs. Find a new sense of belonging with the following...

CLAN Easy.sqd
CONTACT motski@privat.dk
WEBSITE www.easy-cod.tk
MAIN GAME *Call Of Duty*
DETAILS We're a *Call Of Duty* clan, with plans to have a clan in *Medal Of Honor: United Offensive*. The clan is good and the members are friendly. We have a Teamspeak server listed on our website – please take a look and if it appeals, come and join us.

CLAN SAS Euro
CONTACT jon_coops@hotmail.com
WEBSITE sascod.topcities.com
MAIN GAME *Call Of Duty*
DETAILS We're a *COD* clan recruiting players over the age of 18. We're presently 30 players strong and are registered in ClanBase. We do play for fun, but have a serious side when playing in competitions. We have TS2 and run our own server. We also play a lot of friendly games and are well known on the Gamespy network.

CLAN {:OuTcAsTs:}
CONTACT seventyone_4@hotmail.com
WEBSITE www.theoutcasts.co.uk
MAIN GAMES *Call Of Duty*, *Medal Of Honor: Allied Assault*
DETAILS Currently hosting two *COD* and two *MOH:AA* servers, running both S&D and TDM for each platform. We're active in both ClanBase and ClanKombat leagues and are always up for a friendly. Also recruiting players who have a sense of fun. The world and his dog are invited.

CLAN Revolt
CONTACT da_mic_153@hotmail.com
WEBSITE www.revolt-clan.co.uk
MAIN GAME *Call Of Duty*
DETAILS Revolt is an old clan with shiny new paint! Formally the ECS and Ich Dien clan, we've reformed to offer the best online experience we can. We have many experienced members, but are always on the lookout for more. We're currently part of ClanKombat. Good luck!

CLAN D.C.A
CONTACT darkraven58@hotmail.com
WEBSITE www.dcaclan.co.uk/DCA
MAIN GAME *Joint Operations*
DETAILS We're a new clan, looking for new members who fancy some ladder/clan matches. We have a server on most days and nights, and have training nights for teamwork. We also use Teamtalk/Vent. If you're interested, take a look at our site or join in one of our games – you're more than welcome. Most of all, have fun!

CLAN We Were Soldiers
CONTACT HQ@wws-clan.net
WEBSITE www.wws-clan.net
MAIN GAMES *Battlefield 1942* and *Battlefield Vietnam*
DETAILS With four servers, our own radio station, 70+ members and weekly training matches, We Were Soldiers is the clan to join! Named by Indigobluestore.com as "the biggest and best *Battlefield* clan we know", We Were Soldiers is the most competitive, dedicated, friendly, organised and skilled clan to sign up to.

To feature in Guildhall, simply send your details and no more than 50 words describing your group to online.zone@pczone.co.uk (subject line: GUILDHALL) or to Guildhall, *PC ZONE*, Future Publishing, 99 Baker Street, London, W1U 6FP.

▼

Do you reckon their heads go all the way to the top of those hats?

Pets help in combat, provide comfort, or serve as a night light.

Behold my glowing yo-yos of doom.

RIGHT THEN, let's get started. If I've come to learn anything about you in the many, many years we've all been together (other than your collective love of aniseed balls), it's that when it comes to games such as *Final Fantasy XI Online* you don't want loads of waffle setting the scene, describing the game contents and going into great depth about crafting processes. No, what you want is a straight answer to two or three key questions.

First, what does *FFXI* offer that you're not going to get in the *EverQuests* and *Dark Age Of Camelots* of this world? Second, is it even worth your while jumping into a world that's already been extensively chronicled by American and Japanese gamers for the best part of two years now? Third, shouldn't we all just wait on a bit

FINAL FANTASY XI ONLINE

■ £34.99 (+ $12.99 monthly subscription) | Pub: Ubi Soft
Dev: Square Enix | ETA: Out Now | www.playonline.com

REQUIRES PIII 800, 128MB RAM, a 32MB 3D card and a 56K modem
DESIRES P4 1.2GHz, 512MB, a 128MB 3D card and a broadband connection

Half a million Americans can't be wrong, surely? *Paul Presley*
puts reason to one side and enters a world of pure fantasy...

for the *EverQuest II/World Of Warcraft* double whammy about to hit us in the gut several months from now?

Good questions all, so let's deal with them in turn shall we? (Incidentally, if you do want a detailed rewording of the manual then go and read the *FFXI* website. We practise actual journalism here.)

PLAY TOGETHER
So, what differentiates *FFXI* from the others then? Well for starters, you're not going to find another MMOG that's anywhere near as welcoming as this. While the whole PlayOnline front-end interface might

initially seem a cumbersome folly, it's not long before you're wishing all your online games could be handled through such a console-style browser. It's a hell of a lot easier on the eye than Windows, and having all your contacts, community options and breaking news in

such a friendly, happy place puts you in a good mood before you even start the game proper. PC developers really need to start learning lessons of presentation from our console brethren.

As for the game itself, while for the most part it subscribes to all the usual fantasy MMORPG

traditions, it at least does it all with a level of polish that Mr Sheen would be hard pushed to rival. While some MMOGs might be content to throw meaningless level grinding quest templates at you over and over again to see you rise the ranks, *FFXI's* missions all have some

INPERSPECTIVE

DARK AGE OF CAMELOT
Reviewed Issue 142, Score 78%
Fantasy with a similar realm vs. realm feel, but including actual PvP combat. Adored by loyalists, but no match for *EverQuest*.

ANARCHY ONLINE: SHADOWLANDS
Reviewed Issue 134, Score 80%
Sci-fi oddness for the more hardcore crowd. Recent expansions have opened the game to a new audience and it's still going strong after three years. The *Alien Invasion* expansion is reviewed on page 120.

Glowball tossing is a popular sport.

FEMALE HUME
The Hume: the all-rounders of *FFXI*.

Who said wind power was ineffective?

No sign of that *Final Fantasy* BDSM club then?

Those new Dyson hoovers are a god-send.

Bet it's a dye job.

"ALL THINGS TO ALL PEOPLE..."

WE STOPPED RIDING CHOCOBOS LONG ENOUGH TO ASK *FFXI'S* PRODUCER (AND SQUARE ENIX'S SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT) HIROMICHI TANAKA ONE OR TWO QUESTIONS...

PCZ: What do you feel has made *FFXI* so popular with players across the world?

Tanaka: There isn't really any kind of secret of how to keep people in the game. What it comes down to is meeting other people in the game and building relationships. That's the real draw card. We've always thought that the theme of the entire game is about communication between people. When people come in and form friendships that's what keeps them going.

PCZ: Hence the recent introduction of weddings into the game.

Tanaka: Yes. We also introduced the mentor system, where more experienced players help newbies get used to the game.

PCZ: At launch there wasn't much in the way of MMO gaming in Japan. How much did Square have to think about whether to go ahead with the project at all?

Tanaka: At first, when I was asked to take the *Final Fantasy* series online and create a never-ending story in a fantasy universe I wasn't very sure about online games. I'd heard about them but hadn't experienced them very much. It didn't take very long for me to realise just how interesting they were and to realise that this was definitely a way we should go.

It was a risk financially back then, but I didn't want to miss out on being able to create this kind of enjoyment. So even if it was a risk to make a game like no other game made before, that had these interesting elements of interaction and communication, I couldn't resist it. I had to make it.

PCZ: Where does the future lie for Square in terms of online gaming?

Tanaka: Other online games are already in production at Square Enix and we do have more planned, however from our experience we realise that players only have so much time in the day so we don't want to flood the market. To that end we'd like to try and make *FFXI* all things to all people as much as is possible.
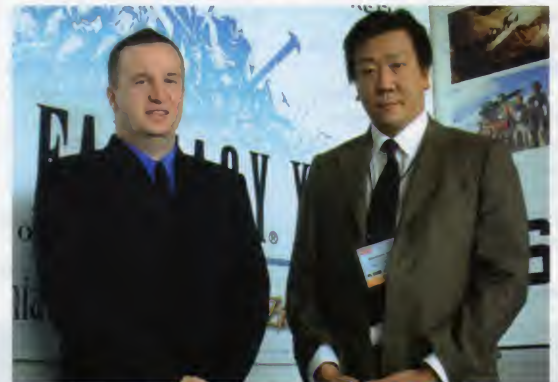
Tanaka-san (right) at the recent European Games Network.

kind of meaningful story attached, the majority of which even come with (in-game engine powered) cut-scenes.

The importance of this cannot be overstated. The single biggest thing that puts most people off playing a MMOG is the fear of the grind. Repetitive rat killing for hours on end does not make for a enjoyable night's

gaming. With everything here having some sort of purpose (whether it's simply helping a small boy find his father, or teaming up to kill a giant dragon wyrm in a far-flung cavern), you not only enjoy your time in the game, but you actually feel as though you're making some sort of difference to the world.

I haven't mentioned *FFXI's* own brand of game mechanics,

and for good reason. The game does things like combat, crafting, skill advancement and levelling in its own way. Combat follows traditional *FF* styles, only with a real-time element thrown in. Crafting adheres to the mystical backdrop of the game world, involving fusing crystals with energy rather than hitting bits of metal with a hammer and tongs. Levelling is a mixture of individual skill ratings and overall character experience points. All of it is horses for courses (or chocobos for, uh, track-obos...).

FFXI is no place for children.

This is going to be messy.

"If inhabitants avoid each other like the plague and interact only to shaft each other, you might as well make *Streatham High Street Online*"

YOU HAVE BEEN WATCHING...

MALE HUME
Similar to the female, only prone to belching.

FEMALE ELVAAN
Hoity-toity and adept at wearing skimpy kecks.

MALE ELVAAN
Smarmy know-it-alls with superiority issues.

FEMALE TARUTARU
Cute as a pixie wearing ribbons. Irritating really.

MALE TARUTARU
Easily trod on by taller races with big shoes.

MITHRA
Female-only cat people who reek of sexuality.

GALKA
Ambisexual brutes who love to punch things.

You'll either like the way it works or you won't. There are better gaming systems, there are worse. Everything is solidly built and there are precious few instances of fighting the mechanics rather than the monsters on show.

Combat is a touch random in places, and in large group situations it can often be very confusing as to what is making an impact on the enemy and what isn't. But apart from that, there's not much you can criticise in the game's overall construction. (That is, unless you count oft-bemoaned problems like the insane World Pass system that prevents you from choosing which server you get to play on, a limit of one character per account, extremely limited character customisation options and a level/reward ratio that, in my view, errs on the side of extremely stingy.)

BREAKING THE ICE

From a social standpoint, *FFXI* is something of a curate's egg. After all, you might have the most polished game in all of Christendom, but if your inhabitants all avoid each other like the plague and interact only to shaft each other in the marketplace, you might as well be making *Streatham High Street Online*.

With the game having been available to Johnny Foreigner already, the sudden influx of European adventurers exploring the lower reaches of the world provokes different reactions depending on your server.

Despite officially sanctioned endeavours such as linkshells (personalised chat rooms), mentor systems (old hands helping out the newbies) and even authorised wedding ceremonies all encouraging the denizens of Vana'diel to play happily together, *FFXI* tends to be one of the more insular MMOs in community terms. Hopefully we'll see this change as our European style, grace and savoir faire slowly wins hearts, and if not at least we'll have each other to share time zones with.

Not the most typical member of the Rambler's Association, but it's a hell of a lot better than Janet Street-Porter.

"So what's your name? Fluff? Petal? Daisy?"

Better than some landlords I've had.

Now there's something you don't see everyday.

And the competition? True, the noises coming from the *World Of Warcraft* camps are already proclaiming it as a new dawn in online gaming. The *EQ2* beta test is winning almost as many plaudits and since it'll only be a few more months before they get here, what chance does *FFXI* really have?

WORLD OF EVERCRAFT

Well, having sampled all three I can state that Square Enix's effort will be able to hold its own. A half million-strong community is a hard thing to shift so you'll not be lost for things to do and people to do it with (if you can get them talking). Plus we Euronauts get to enjoy the latest expansion, *Chains Of Promathia* right from the get-go so there's plenty of scope for exploration.

Basically, Square Enix has had one hell of a headstart on the other contenders and has managed to construct a solid, enjoyable and absorbing world that doesn't resort to grinding. *World Of Warcraft* may have the balance and *EverQuest II* the heritage, but *FFXI* has the players and right now, that counts for everything. PCZ

PCZONE VERDICT

✔ Never short of something to do
✔ Story-driven quests aid to the sense of purpose
✔ High population levels
✔ Still looks beautiful
✘ Quirky design features serve to annoy
✘ Combat often confusing

81

A solid, second-tier fantasy world

Next best thing to an Ewok log trap.
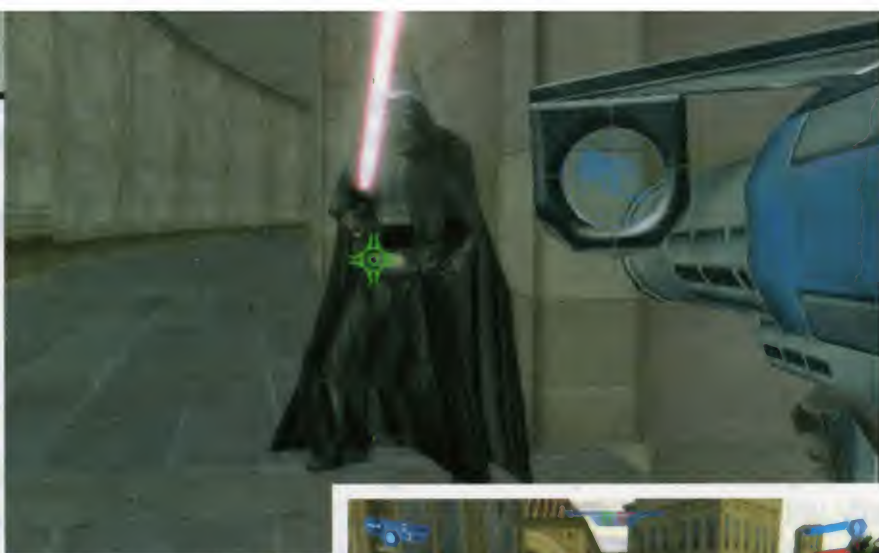
Even Vader might be worried here...

STAR WARS BATTLEFRONT

■ £34.99 | Pub: Activision | Dev: Pandemic/LucasArts |
ETA: Out Now | starwarsbattlefront.com

REQUIRES PIII 1GHz, 256MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card (with hardware T&L)
DESIRES P4 2GHz, 512MB RAM, a 128MB 3D card and a broadband
Internet connection

Jamie Sefton travels to a galaxy far,
far away to find a *Star Wars* game
that's far, far from perfect

Let's try a little old-fashioned rocket-jumping.

STAR *Wars
Battlefront* could have
been my dream PC
game. A first-person
shooter set across
episodes I-VI, where you
can join any side, play as a
multitude of different
soldier classes and fly a
multitude of vehicles in massive
online battles. Want to recreate
the scene from *Empire*, where
Dack and Luke attack an AT-AT
walker in a snowspeeder?
Sorted. How about the end of
Jedi where the Imperials attack
the forest moon of Endor with

"Either I just lifted that with the Force, or someone's nicking my X-Wing..."

AT-ST walkers and Speeder
bikes, allowing you to execute
furry Ewoks at will? Naturally.
Can you imagine how good a
game like this could be?

ALL TOO EASY
Unfortunately (cue the sound
of a baleful Wookiee roar)
Battlefront is a bag of pearls in
sick – it's utterly fantastic and
woefully poor in equal measure.
One minute you're marvelling
at how cool riding a Tauntaun
is, the next you're blinking
in disbelief at an enemy
Stormtrooper's thick-as-pigshit
AI. Yet, despite the frayed edges,
there's still plenty for *Star Wars*

fans to enjoy – even those not
satiated after the recent release
of the original trilogy on DVD.

Battlefront is playable in
single player using bots, with
three varied modes: the self-
explanatory Instant Action,
Galactic Conquest (which has
you battling for each of the ten
planets such as Hoth and
Kamino in turn) and a story-
based Historical Campaign.
However, we're here in Online
Zone because the main thrust of
the game is multiplayer, whether
on LAN or over the Net, with
more than 32 players able to
join in at any time, complete
with voice headset support.

The basic strategy behind
Battlefront is to control the
battlefield by taking over
command posts, indicated by
red and green markers on the
map. Simply stand next to them
and wait until they turn the
colour of your team. This denies
your opponents a spawn point,
as well as decreasing their
overall team points indicated by
the bars at the top of the screen.
Anyone who's played *Battlefield
1942* will instantly be at home.

Usually, levels feature two
factions – Rebel Alliance or
Galactic Empire from classic
Star Wars, and Clone Army or
Separatists from the 'new' *Star*

"S, t, o, r, m... t, r, o... dammit, ran out of wee."

I'm gonna make my clone daddy proud.

Sarlacc dentistry had its dangers.

Wars – but occasionally a third non-playable faction will join in the action, such as the Ewoks on Endor or the Tusken Raiders on Tatooine.

Each of the factions has five classes of soldier to choose from, each possessing different skills and weapon sets. Highlights include the rolling fast-firing Droideka robots, the Wookiee smuggler (complete with bowcaster rifle) and my favourites, the Jet Trooper and Dark Trooper, who both possess a rather handy jetpack for leaping over buildings and dropping right into a battle from above. Nice.

WHERE IT'S AT-AT

Combat is literally hit-and-miss. The basic blasters and rifles just don't feel meaty enough, although the turrets, rocket launchers and thermal detonators do pack a punch, blasting ragdoll bodies high into the air or through windows. Most importantly though, the 30-plus vehicles in *Battlefront*, including X-Wings and TIE Fighters, are enormous fun, allowing up to six players in certain craft such as the Republic Gunship.

Climbing aboard the AT-AT and blasting the shield generator on Hoth can be an almost religious experience, as can stomping through the Endor forest aboard an AT-ST, crushing Ewoks underfoot with every stride. Handling, in most cases, is excellent, and the velocity of vehicles such as the speeder bike, that can zip deftly in and out trees, is thrilling stuff.

Bots are available in both single- and multiplayer
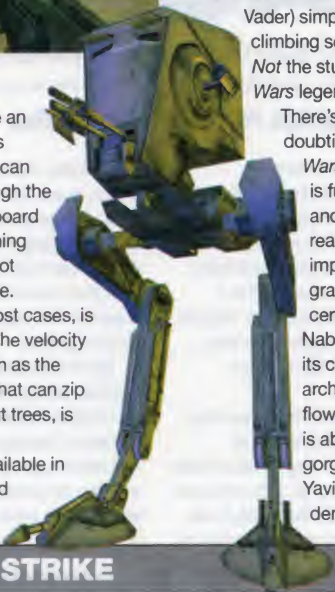
games to make up the numbers, but the AI is, like the game – very good and very bad. At one point on the cloud city of Bespin, a rebel comrade saw I was low on health and tossed me a Bacta tank – very useful. However, our Prezzer managed to confuse the Dark Lord of The Sith (Darth Vader) simply by climbing some stairs. *Not* the stuff of *Star Wars* legend.

There's no doubting that *Star Wars Battlefront* is fun to play, and has some really impressive graphics in certain levels. Naboo, with its classical architecture and flower beds, is absolutely gorgeous, as is Yavin IV, with dense forest and shimmering water fountains. This is *Star Wars* for goodness sake, and the licence makes it so much more enjoyable, with all the recognisable characters (including Vader and Luke Skywalker as NPCs), locations,

vehicles and goosebump-inducing sound effects.

When you get a whole group of you as Dark Troopers jetting all over the levels, blowing each other up and causing ridiculous mayhem, *Battlefront* is laugh-out-loud hilarious. We've heard rumblings that Xbox and PlayStation 2 journos are absolutely loving *Battlefront*, and with online gaming being relatively new to consoles, they've every right to get a bit excited. Us PC owners, however, have somewhat higher standards, with *Battlefield*

1942/Vietnam (Battlefront's obvious inspiration), *Joint Ops*, *Counter-Strike* and *UT2004* all just a fat broadband pipe away. In fact, the *Troopers* mod for *UT2004* has some similar content to *Battlefront*, with more

"When you get a whole group of Dark Troopers jetting about, *Battlefront* is simply hilarious"

multiplayer modes, proper space battles and is absolutely free (see Rebel Strike box).

You can thank your lucky Death Stars that *Battlefront* is a decent game at all, but it definitely feels like Pandemic (responsible for *Full Spectrum Warrior*) and LucasArts have rushed to get the game out in time for the trilogy DVD release. If there's to be a *Battlefront 2*, we're sure that many of the issues such as ropey AI, unsatisfying combat and lack of gameplay modes can be addressed. But for now, this is not quite the *Star Wars* title we were looking for. [PCZ]

REBEL STRIKE

TAKE THE PEPSI CHALLENGE

Can you tell which of these shots is from *Star Wars Battlefront* and which is from the free *UT2004* mod, *Troopers*? No, neither can we (and hopefully neither can LucasArts' lawyers).

Troopers or *Battlefront*?

Battlefront or *Troopers*?

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✔ It's *Star Wars* meets *Battlefield 1942*!
- ✔ You can kill Ewoks and Gungans
- ✔ Vehicles are fantastic
- ✔ Great fun
- ✘ Combat often feels weak
- ✘ Only one online game mode

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Almost there, almost there...

"And for my next trick – pulling a rabbit from my top hat!"

"These aliens will be no match for my Pert Buttocks of Mesmiration."

ANARCHY ONLINE ALIEN INVASION

■ 29.99 Euros (downloadable) | Pub: Funcom | Dev: Funcom | ETA: Out Now | www.anarchy-online.com

REQUIRES PII 300, 128MB RAM, a 32MB 3D card and a modem **DESIRES** PIII 1.2GHz, 512MB RAM, a 64MB 3D card and a broadband Internet connection

Emerging from the shadow(land)s, *Paul Presley* readies his Geiger counter

SO, HANDS UP who's expecting another *Shadowlands*? That's the problem with setting such high standards – it's often the devil's own task to match or better yourself when you're called upon to produce a follow-up.

Which is why, despite some grumblings among the hardcore, Funcom has taken the eminently sensible decision to not even try and top its previous effort, and instead for *Alien Invasion* focuses on hitting a few specific targets, rather than trying to be all things to all people.

So who is *AI* aimed at then? Well, if you're happy ploughing your own furrow in *AO* and you couldn't care less for the social aspects involved in joining large teams and finding common goals, don't let the door hit your arse on the way out. This isn't for you. *AI* is an expansion firmly of the old school – aimed at large organisations (*AO*'s version of guilds), veteran players who've exhausted the current content and provides new ways of encouraging teamwork.

Which is where the grumblings first began. There's nowt as queer as folk, and there's definitely no one more attuned to complaining bitterly than those excluded from a game's target audience, despite already having plenty to keep them busy in the previous expansions.

It boils down to the fact that *AI* is tuned towards larger organisations. Player cities finally provide large orgs with a place to call home, with the ability to lay down meeting rooms, swimming pools, bars, clubs, houses, mines, guard towers and force fields. These latter items are particularly important as they form the crux of the other, more obvious, aspect of the expansion – the invading aliens.

Since it's launch, *AO* has trundled along nicely, relying on MMOG staples such as instanced dungeons and hunting monsters to provide players with levelling opportunities. Not much else though. Now the tables have turned. The game world of

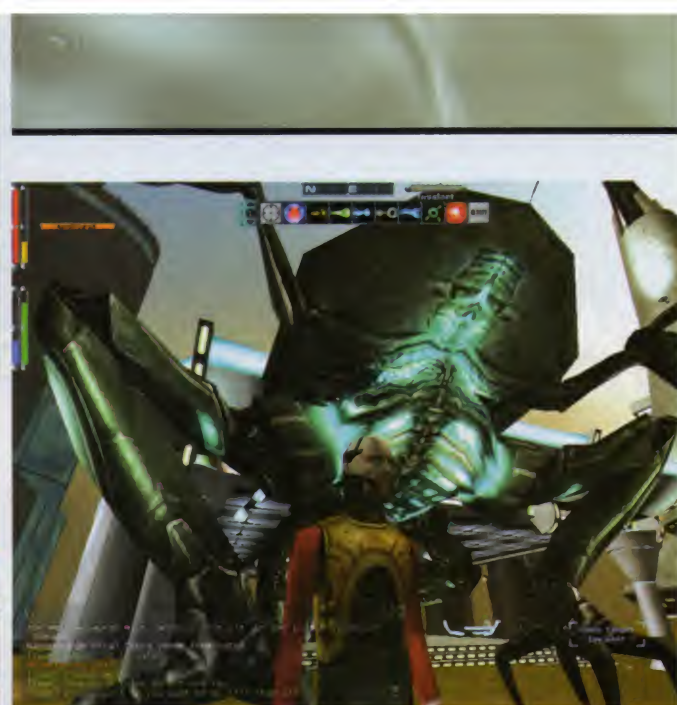Always get your hair fixed before you invade a planet.

Orgs can build their own PvP fight club arenas.

Calling occupants of interplanetary, most extraordinary craft...

See, even nasty aliens are scared of spiders.

"Let me guess. He's behind me isn't he?"

"Bad alien! Take this pillow and go to bed."

The kids from Fame: circa 29475AD.

Well somebody's obviously overcompensating.

Rubi-ka is under extra-terrestrial attack and the main targets are the player cities. If Mohammed won't go to the instanced dungeon zones...

Orgs have a measure of control over when they get attacked by turning off their cloaking towers and inviting the aliens in for a big old barney. Invasion sizes are determined by the relative strength of the players present, with a trip on to the alien landing ship and a battle with the big boss (along with commensurable rewards) offered as the overall goal.

MEN IN FLAK

These attacks are impressively dramatic in atmosphere. First a few low level scouts sniff around to test the lay of the land. The engine checks up on who's around, what their previous track record is, whether any other guilds are helping out nearby and so on. Then the heavens quake, the skies rumble and the giant mothership hoves into view, blotting out the sun á la Independence Day and causing much changing of +1 armoured underpants.

Theoretically the engine has been designed to cater for all levels of player, but in the heat of

battle it can become all too easy for a level 5 adventurer to accidentally target a level 100 alien general and be wiped out before he can say "where's Will Smith when you need him?" Just be sure of your targets is all.

The other ingredients in this expansion stew are mainly social

"The mothership hoves into view, causing much changing of +1 armoured underpants"

in nature – new clothes, items, vehicle designs and player cities all help reward the players that have turned AO into one of the more sociable MMOGs available. Funcom has added a few new playing fields, but

ostensibly this has been to provide enough space for the players to build their homesteads. These locales add a fresh new look to the world – amateur town planning skills notwithstanding – with some of the most impressively tall buildings Rubi-ka has ever seen.

That said, it's impressive in respect of the rapidly aging engine that lies at heart of AO. Graphically, it's fair to say the game is starting to suffer next to the upcoming likes of EQ2, World Of Warcraft or Ryzom –

even next to perhaps it's most direct rival, Star Wars Galaxies, it's starting to appear somewhat underpowered. But in relation to what the three-year old engine is capable of, Funcom has done a pretty fine job.

NO 'I' IN TEAM

Visuals aside though, the cities (and the new organisation commands) offer players a greater sense of involvement in the world and a deeper sense of purpose. There have been a lot of complaints about the expense of these buildings, and Funcom is strongly advised to address these issues lest it feels the wrath of player backlash.

The question is, do you need it? As mentioned earlier, this is

an expansion pack aimed squarely at the team players in AO, but one that will affect the focus of the world whether you partake in it or not. AI isn't likely to be enough in and of itself to attract new players to the game (unlike Shadowlands, which, incidentally, is a part of the game that remains totally unaffected by AI), and you'll still have plenty to do without it.

On the other hand, AI can definitely be seen as a statement of intent by Funcom that it's in no way about to let the faithful go unrewarded for their time and efforts. Which is perhaps as good a reason as any for it to exist. It's always nice to know that someone cares. **PCZ**

"I'm a cowboy!" "Of course you are dear..."

At least the Borg aren't about.

PCZONE VERDICT

✔ More focused group combat
✔ New lease of life for old hands
✔ Player towns add social action
✘ Little for low-level or solo players
✘ Engine starting to look dated
✘ Player-owned shops

77

A reward for veterans

No Easter Eggs in this game (ahem).

Wonder where the bomb goes?

Base destruction means no new units.

Looks like C&C, plays like UT. (*That's enough acronyms for one caption – Ed*)

ARENA WARS

■ £19.99 | Pub: Ascaron/Koch Media | Dev: exDream | ETA: Out Now |
www.arena-wars.com

REQUIRES PII 700MHz, 128MB RAM, 32MB 3D card and a modem
DESIRES PIII 1.4GHz, 512MB RAM, 64MB 3D card and a broadband or cable Internet connection

It looks like an RTS, but plays like an FPS. Has the PC found itself an original game? *Richie Shoemaker* investigates

NOW here's an idea that's so bleedin' obvious, it makes you wonder why it's taken so long for someone to develop it: a real-time strategy game featuring game modes common to first person shooters. Y'know, like capture the flag, bombing run and double domination. Only they're all played like one of

them there strategy games.

Actually, I'll tell you why nobody has pressed the concept into production: it sounds bloody awful. I mean, why fiddle from above when you can get in there and experience it face-to-face with *Unreal Tournament*?

It's a valid question and one that will gnaw at you until you actually get into the spirit and allow yourself to enjoy the game. You see, as ridiculous as it first seems, the simple tag-like nature of these staple FPS gameplay modes transfers very well to the C&C dynamic. The small maps, complete lack of resource gathering and simple objectives (flags must be shepherded back to base and victory locations held for a certain period of time) ensure that games are furious and frantic. What's more, because there are only six units

available to build for each player, the developer has had the luxury of being able to carefully balance each of them, to the degree that no one unit dominates the game.

BUILD UP

To add some sparkle to the proceedings, you can pick up various tokens to imbue your units with extra speed, armour or firepower. Each unit also has a built-in special ability that may

turn it from a slow heavily-armed behemoth into an insta-teleporting behemoth, for instance.

Another facet of the game is the cost of the units: although you have to shell out for them, whenever a unit expires you're reimbursed in full. This means that although you have a finite amount of coin to finance your strategy, it's unlikely you'll ever want for any units. You might be cursing the time it takes to build them, mind…

EYE TO EYE

Despite the healthy community of fans (many of whom are frighteningly good and very German), the obscene number of maps, the 'aggressive price' and the simple, fast-paced gameplay, *Arena Wars* does lack a certain amount of longevity.

Interesting gimmicks such as in-game webcams and voiceover-IP comms add some interest, but only when playing with

friends. Looking German teenagers in the eye as they beat you isn't very satisfying…

What there is works very well, but like their namesake game modes in *Unreal Tournament*, there are only so many flags you can capture and bombs you can run before fatigue sets in. *UT* has Assault and Onslaught maps you can fall back on, not to mention numerous mods. *Arena Wars* has nothing and once the novelty has worn off, interest will quickly fade. **PCZ**

"As ridiculous as it seems, the simple tag-like nature of these staple FPS gameplay modes transfers very well"

PCZONE VERDICT

✔ Simple, fast-paced gameplay
✔ Well-balanced units
✔ Good bots, loads of maps
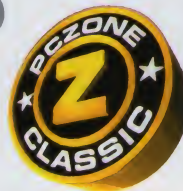✔ Webcam support
✘ Lacks longevity
✘ Game modes are too similar

# 68

A nice idea that's quickly forgotten

THE SHIP V0045

SIZE 29MB **REQUIRES** Full version of *Half-Life*
TOTAL CONVERSION
www.theshiponline.com

PCZONE Z CLASSIC

A life at sea can be murder on your nerves.
Paul Presley **races for the lifeboats**

We can only pray they do a conversion for *Half-Life 2*.

BEST described as Cluedo meets Deathmatch, *The Ship* is one of the most original and enjoyable takes on multiplayer gaming we've seen for ages. The setting is a luxury cruise ship in the 1920s, packed with every Agatha Christie-type character you can think of. And naturally, murder is afoot. Except that rather than trying to find out whodunit, you're one of the killers. Along with everybody else. The simple premise is that every player is assigned a single 'target' – another passenger – each of whom has a target of their own. You only
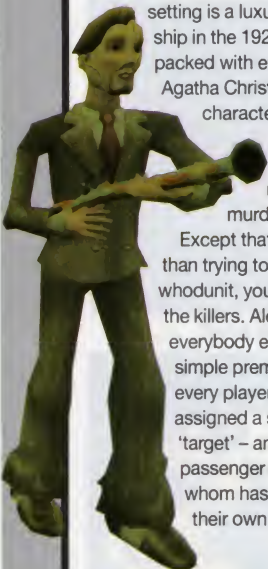
"This won't hurt a bit..."

score points for bumping off your assigned victim and only if you do so without being discovered. Get caught by the ship's security and you'll find yourself cooling off in the brig.

Just to add a further wrinkle to proceedings, you can only

find out who someone is by going up to them and saying hello, which naturally reveals your identity too and should you accidentally say hello to your potential killer...

Bottom line is that *The Ship* is an absolute joy to play. The

In the hallway, Colonel Mustard, with the .44 Magnum.

paranoia, the feeling of menace, the thrill of the hunt – all the right ingredients are here.

At present there are only about four servers in the entire world, but there is a dedicated group of fans and you're almost always guaranteed a game.

Even the developers host regular sessions – how often do you see that? A classic in every sense.

PCZONE VERDICT **91**
Sure to make a killing

SILENT HEROES V0.40

SIZE: 394MB **REQUIRES:** Full version of *Battlefield 1942*
www.silentheroes.se
TOTAL CONVERSION

PCZONE Z ESSENTIAL

Be vewy, vewy quiet. *Tony Lamb* **is hunting Norwegians**

Sweden hasn't seen action like this since *Busty Milkmaids 4*.

NORWAY and Sweden might be famous for Vikings, expensive beer and blonde goddesses with a refreshing attitude to nudity, but they're not the first countries you think of when battle mods come to mind. All that could change though because *Silent Heroes* pitches the two modern-day nations against each other in full-blown warfare.

The premise is that with the Iraq war dragging on, pulling in ever greater numbers of NATO troops, a group of high ranking

Something doesn't look right... Ah! No scallies in shellsuits.

Swedish officers revisit an age-old battle plan. While the attention of the world is focused on the Middle East, they invade Norway. Naturally enough, the Norwegians are upset.

Silent Heroes wins points on many fronts. With clever, well-designed maps and a variety of game types it should keep any *Battlefield* fan happy for hours. The mod also offers a selection of unique weapons and vehicles most players will be unfamiliar with and a loving attention to detail that gives the whole thing

a great sense of atmosphere. Indeed, the feeling of realism is matched only by a few of the best-known mods. At the moment, *SH* is limited by the non-availability of AI players and a shortage of online support, but this deserves to change. In the meantime, a LAN game of *Silent Heroes* is as good as any other mod out there.

PCZONE VERDICT **80**
Deserves to be big
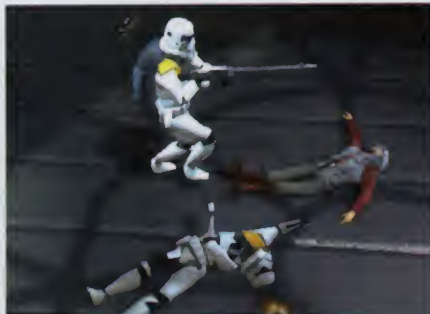

Where's your neutrality now, eh?

Ooh, does it play DVDs?

UT2004 TROOPERS: DAWN OF DESTINY V4.0

SIZE 295MB **REQUIRES** Full version of *UT2004* www.ut2004troopers.com **TOTAL CONVERSION**

Many Bothans died to bring you *Tony Lamb's* latest mod review

X-Wing Vs. TIE Fighter lives again.

"Who said I can't shoot straight?"

STAR WARS. A faraway world of spaceships, stormtroopers and cute furry animals. Perhaps the greatest sci-fi universe ever created. A mod based on that has to be a sure-fire hit, doesn't it?

Well, it does now. A year ago *UT Troopers* was available as a demo version for *UT2003* and it reflected many of the traits of your typical *Star Wars* game. It looked great and displayed ambition by the bucketload, but it ultimately wasn't much fun to play and revealed enough flaws to make the demo version annoyingly disappointing. Its score of 69 per cent, however, reflected the potential it showed

with its neat, atmospheric maps and well thought-out gameplay modes.

Now converted to using *UT2004* as its base engine, *UT Troopers* has come along in leaps and bounds, with ever-better skins, a good selection of large and film-accurate locations and a number of usable vehicles.

In all, it's a far more solid and entertaining experience throughout.

There are still a couple of niggles – some slightly wooden animations for example – but overall this is a very enjoyable mod. The variety of game types (Conquest, CTF and Team Deathmatch) and satisfyingly large maps make it a worthwhile addition to anyone's library, and a decent-sized LAN or online game is pretty much assured of being a blast.

PCZONE VERDICT **76**
Battlefront beware

SHATTERED OASIS V2.20

SIZE 332MB **REQUIRES** Full version of *UT2004* **TOTAL CONVERSION**
www.shatteredoasis.jolt.co.uk

PCZONE Z ESSENTIAL

Tony Lamb cops a mouthful of desert sand

YOU'D THINK that mod developers would get bored with post-apocalyptic worlds. Doesn't anyone have faith in the future of mankind? Well, whether or not we're all going to hell in a handbasket, we can at least see what it might look like with quality mods like *Shattered Oasis*.

The storyline for *SO* isn't unusual – the survivors of a nuclear war have coalesced into two disparate groups. On one side are the Compounders, a more or less peaceful people who just want to live in solitude and not be bothered. On the other are the Variants – wild, brutal scavengers who hate the Compounders and their hippy ways. Naturally the two are permanently at war.

However, while *SO* doesn't take too many risks with its story and setting, the implementation is better than most, and may be enough to propel it into the premier league.

Well crafted throughout, this *UT2004* mod adds a raft of new

Useful for making the school run.

vehicles, skins, weapons and other accoutrements as well as two entirely new gameplay types. It's a rare treat, and one that justifies its large download size in a world where 300MB+ mods are commonplace. The new game types – Arena and Detonation – are the mod's best features, offering a one-on-one deathmatch and an objective-

based game where blowing up the enemy base is the key. Maps are well designed too, being both atmospheric and enjoyable. All in all, this apocalyptic vision has produced a top class mod.

PCZONE VERDICT **83**
A rising star

The bridge isn't the only thing wobbling.

The hidden dangers of clean air fuels.

COMMUNITY CHEST

DOOM 3

It came, it saw, it was modded to bits. *Daniel Emery* looks at what the community has done with id's latest monster

It may have taken over ten years to arrive, but the graphically gobsmacking remake of *Doom* has landed with a mightily impressive thump. It earned the distinction of being the first PC title to reach the top slot in the UK all-formats chart since *The Sims*, and is undoubtedly one of the best games of the year. As was inevitable, a plethora of mods, weapons, skins, utilities and more have already shown up for the game, some of them truly excellent. It's been a monumental task picking the best eight and there's dozens more we'd have liked to include. Still, here are some good starting points...

DUCT TAPE
(MOD)
ducttape.glenmurphy.com
One of the first *Doom 3* mods to hit the Net, this is a very simple add-on that some purists might call a hack – or fix. *Duct Tape* basically tapes a torch to the end of the machine gun/shotgun, using the premise that "a roll has to exist somewhere on the Mars facility." We think it spoils the tension a bit, but it's still fun.

NITRO DOOM
(MOD)
www.nitroclan.de
This is a nifty mod that increases blood and gore levels, plus removes corpse decomposition so bodies pile up all over the place. The website's in German, but the important download section is in English, so it's not too hard to find. Remember, this will punish your frame rate, so only use it on a high-end system.

DOOM3. CONNECTTOOL
(UTILITY)
justbi0.de/d3.html
Another German utility that's pretty much essential for anyone hosting a multiplayer game. For some reason, id put a four player cap on deathmatches (presumably to cater for those Xbox lovers out there). This inevitable patch lets you have up to 32 players in-game at any one time.
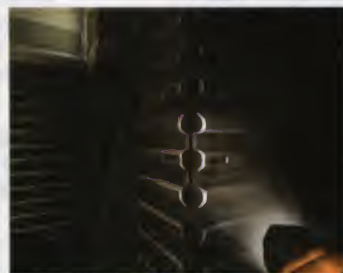
PARALLAX MAPPING MOD
(UTILITY)
www.junkguy.tk
You'd think people would be happy with *Doom 3's* graphics as they are. Not a bit of it. This utility applies parallax mapping to all textures. Parallax mapping or virtual displacement mapping is a recent graphical trick that gives surfaces more depth and realism. And by God, it works!

PLANETDOOM
(WEBSITE)
www.planetdoom.com
Planet Doom is the granddaddy of game fan sites – the original website went live in the mid 1990s. This site has practically every level, map, skin and mod for *Doom 3* there is. There's also a great collection of screen-shots, Easter-eggs and an idiot's guide to level editing. It's updated regularly so keep an eye out for new stuff.

CLASSIC DOOM
(TOTAL CONVERSION)
cdoom.arqz.com
Go back to where it all began with this *Doom 3* mod based on the original game. The maps are instantly recognisable, weapons have been modified to play like the originals and even Imps behave as they once did. The game's still in early alpha, but it's gone public so you can relive the glory days of 1993.
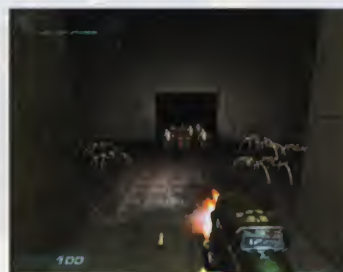
LAST MAN STANDING
(MOD)
lms.d3files.com
For want of a better description, this is a four-way cooperative frag-fest of epic proportions. The goal of every map is to kill as many monsters as you can and remain the last surviving player at the end. The final score's calculated on how many you've killed and how long you survived – just like in the arcades of old.

DOOM3: LEVELS 4 YOU
(WEBSITE)
www.levels4you.com/sections/doom3
Unlike the Planet series, L4Y's not run on a commercial basis. The end result may not look as polished, but the content is packed with maps, tools, patches, mapping tutorials and a busy forum. There should be something here to keep your copy of *Doom 3* busy for months.

STEVE HILL'S NEVERQUEST

Steve Hill (or is it Stef?) finds a new life in *Second Life*

HILL VINDALOO'S

the name, and I am hot. Full lips, big brown eyes, luscious hair, a tidy arse and a cracking pair of knockers. What's more, I can fly. This is better than real life already. It's also something of a departure, as an attractive slim young woman is the diametric opposite of the clown sat at the keyboard.

The look garners favour with my fellow *Second Lifers*, and within seconds of completing my initiation, the strapping Brad Few declares that he rates me highly. Not highly enough to stop him going off with a dwarf called Toy Lafollette, however. Men – who needs them? Not me, I'm a girl's girl, and I swiftly turn my attentions to the nearby Katie Biggles, who also rapidly disappears. Is it my deodorant?

With self-esteem plummeting, I consult the list of local events. There's a pyjama party kicking off in half an hour, specifically the Wetspot Sexy Sleepwear do, which urges attendees to 'get those oh-so-cute jammies on and party with us'. It's a tempting offer, but with time to kill, I teleport towards the Rooftop Kissing Contest.

KISS AND TELL

There's no sign of any kissing, or indeed a rooftop, but I do seem to have wandered into some kind of adult clothing store. Perusing the wares, I like the look of a see-through grey number, going for a reasonable $76. I'm about to try it on when the shopkeeper appears, a

dominatrix by the name of milady Guillaume. Helping me into the outfit, she declares it "nice", before adding the somewhat surprising caveat: "Now – what you need are some nipples."

"Ah," I reply, as if she's just asked me to pick up a loaf of bread, "and where do I get nipples?"

She gives me directions to a mall, where apparently they're widely available. Ever the opportunist, I ask milady if she has nipples herself, and if I could have a quick look at them. She promptly whacks them out, but draws the line at my request for a photograph, unaware that I've already taken one. Bidding me goodbye with a cheery, "Hill, see you later", I shout after her, "and your nipples!"

KISS THE GIRLS

Out of the frying pan and into the fire, I immediately bump into the buxom Yexenia Saito, who looks lost and sexually confused. Bouyed by the previous encounter, and sensing her vulnerability, I invite her to the kissing contest, before telling her that I have to "buy some nipples first".

Yexenia explains that she has no money for the contest, and seizing the moment I ask her if she fancies a kiss anyway.

"Sure," she seductively replies, and I move in for the kill, our supple bodies entwining gracefully like two swans on a lake. With our lips inches apart, and pulses racing, a rumbling sound becomes apparent, and I glance over her shoulder to be confronted with a 12ft rock monster ambling towards us like a walking Stonehenge. Suffice to say, the mood is ruined and Yexenia scatters, never to be seen again.

I LIKE TO PARTY

Downhearted and disillusioned, my lust for *Life* is waning when milady Guillaume reappears like a fairy godmother, presenting me with a free pair of nipples. Seemingly able to support a wet duffel coat, and with areola like bin lids, they're a perfect fit, and I admire myself longingly, thanking milady for her gift.

I've got a pair of tits and I'm going to use them. Searching

the events list for mature content, I'm drawn towards the Kinky Avatar Party, with its invite to 'Work your kinks out at the Flame Room. Come strap-ons, come handcuffs, pets, masters and furverts! If you have a whip to pop or a whip cream bikini… Bring it down!'

Teleporting there, I use the power of flight to land bang in the middle of the dance floor, where I'm immediately hit on by a soldier called Jeff Coral, who declares me "a fine woman" and tries to buy me. Rejecting his advances, I look around the

club, populated by exotic dancers such as Barbie Fauna, and Tasty Tapioca.

Everyone's made a far greater effort than me, and in my simple jeans and top combo I feel decidedly square. In an attempt to redress the balance, I whip off my top to reveal my own jellies, replete with a pair of juicy cherries. I'm about to get the rest of my kit off when the connection dies and I'm bucked back to my first life, sat in the dark surrounded by mugs and magazines. Ban this sick filth. PCZ

Check out Hill's arse!

"Fancy a kiss darlin'?"

> "My new nipples seem able to support a wet duffel coat, areola like bin lids"
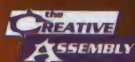

Like Top Shop, but with less pikeys.

"Get yer nipples 'ere!"

APPLE TART

■ HARDWARE EDITOR Phil Wand

▲ I didn't ask for it, but an Apple PowerBook G4 turned up in the post one morning. 'How nice,' I thought, pushing it to one side and confronting my telephone bill instead. Ah yes, bills. Lovely bills, how I enjoy trying to understand them. This one said I had a credit balance of minus 40 quid, which to anyone with even a basic understanding of English and mathematics could mean one of two things. I decided I'd wait and see which way the direct debit swung, and filed it in my top drawer.

Phone bills haven't been clear for, oh, years. Like the new Pentium processor names, nobody understands them; everybody says how much simpler they were back in the day. BT's demands for payment have been through several major redesigns, each claiming to have made things much clearer than before, and all for the good of the customer you understand. In reality, all that's happened is that the company's art department has increased the font size and split everything into multiple sections. And as you're no doubt aware, art departments are filled with Macs.

Ah yes, that Apple. If we ignore all the jokes about ponytails and one-buttoned mice and 'not being real computers', a PowerBook G4 will play pretty much everything an XP notebook will play – *Doom 3, Call Of Duty, Medal Of Honor, Battlefield 1942, The Sims, Unreal Tournament 2004*, and countless other top-sellers you thought were solely for the PC.

PowerBooks are also the best engineered laptops I've ever used, feeling as though they'd survive being bounced down several flights of stairs. This one connected to my wireless network without bother, read and wrote files to my Windows machines, and generally did a fine job of clouting every curved ball I threw at it. If only it would run the best game ever made, I could be ▼ tempted. Maybe…

TAKE IT TO THE MAX
Are you ready to go extreme with Intel?

At close to 4GHz and with a 1066MHz system bus, the new Extreme Edition chips will be as expensive as they are rapid.

NEW desktop processor roadmaps from Intel reveal that the company is set to introduce a 3.46GHz P4 Extreme Edition chip with 2MB Level 3 cache (L3) and 1066MHz front-side bus (FSB) in early November. The 3.73GHz EE with the same Level 3 cache arrangement will follow towards Christmas.

FUTURE SHOCK
Generally speaking, any configuration with a large L3 cache uses system memory more effectively instead of paging to the disk, thus making things happen much quicker. On these pages earlier in the year, we suggested that the magic 4GHz barrier won't be too far off come winter. Now, with Alienware shipping overclocked 4GHz systems to customers, it looks as though we'll soon be into a whole new ballpark.

Intel is likely to price the 2MB L3 Extreme Edition at around £600. Other chips in the line-up have already been subject to the company's August price cuts, and are thus not likely to change. However, early in 2005, Intel plans to introduce its 3.8GHz Pentium 4 670 at around £480, 3.6GHz Pentium 4 660 at £340, 3.4GHz Pentium 4 650 at £225 and 3.2GHz Pentium 4 640 at £150. When that happens, it's likely that the current crop of chips will be discounted accordingly. The new chips are all Prescott-based and are all set to feature LGA 775 packaging and, somewhat disappointingly, the old 800MHz bus.

SUPER SPEEDY
Of particular interest to gamers is the Enhanced Speed Step Technology, previously seen in certain Pentium M derivatives, which is able to dynamically and invisibly overclock the chip. AMD fans will be the first to point out that Athlons have done this for some time now.

Right now, Intel's releasing tweaked Pentium 4 and Celeron processors featuring virus protection, denoted by a J in their model designation (see table below). It's also producing an LGA 775 packaged 3GHz Celeron with 533MHz FSB and 256K cache for no more than £75. For more, www.intel.com.

ROLL UP, ROLL UP...

Processor	Clock	FSB	AVAILABLE
Pentium 4 EE 3.73	3.73GHz	1066MHz	Winter 2004
Pentium 4 EE 3.46	3.46GHz	1066MHz	Winter 2004
Pentium 4 670	3.80GHz	800MHz	Spring 2005
Pentium 4 660	3.60GHz	800MHz	Spring 2005
Pentium 4 650	3.40GHz	800MHz	Spring 2005
Pentium 4 640	3.20GHz	800MHz	Spring 2005
Pentium 4 580J	4.00GHz	800MHz	Spring 2005
Pentium 4 570J	3.80GHz	800MHz	Winter 2004
Pentium 4 560J	3.60GHz	800MHz	Now
Pentium 4 550J	3.40GHz	800MHz	Now
Pentium 4 540J	3.20GHz	800MHz	Now
Pentium 4 530J	3.00GHz	800MHz	Now
Pentium 4 520J	2.80GHz	800MHz	Now
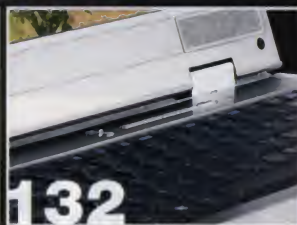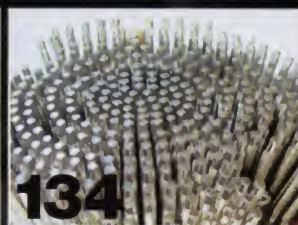
Nobody beat him.
Is anyone surprised?

A BIT FATAL

It's a lame name, but he really knows his game

JOHNATHAN WENDEL, better known as 23-year old pro-gamer 'Fatal1ty' was recently in Leicester Square on the London leg of his ABIT-Fatal1ty world tour. Anyone able to beat him to six frags at *Doom 3* would walk off with a cheque for £1,000, plus the respect of id suck-ups the world over. And as if you couldn't guess, ABIT's bank account came out unscathed – Mr Wendel puts in a whole eight hours practice every day in the run-up to a tournament, making any match against random members of the public somewhat lopsided. However, ABIT remained a good sport, handing out a number of consolation prizes and promotional bits and bobs – one of them an Extreme Edition processor.

The tour is helping to promote ABIT's new Intel-based, Fatal1ty-branded motherboard, featuring the 925XE chipset, LGA775 form factor, 1066MHz quad-pumped bus and Pulse Width Modulated (PWM) power regulation. ABIT claims that Wendel worked closely with its engineers on the new board, giving ideas on what features and specs could improve his game. Look out for an AMD version of the Fatal1ty mobo within the next few months. www.abit.com.tw
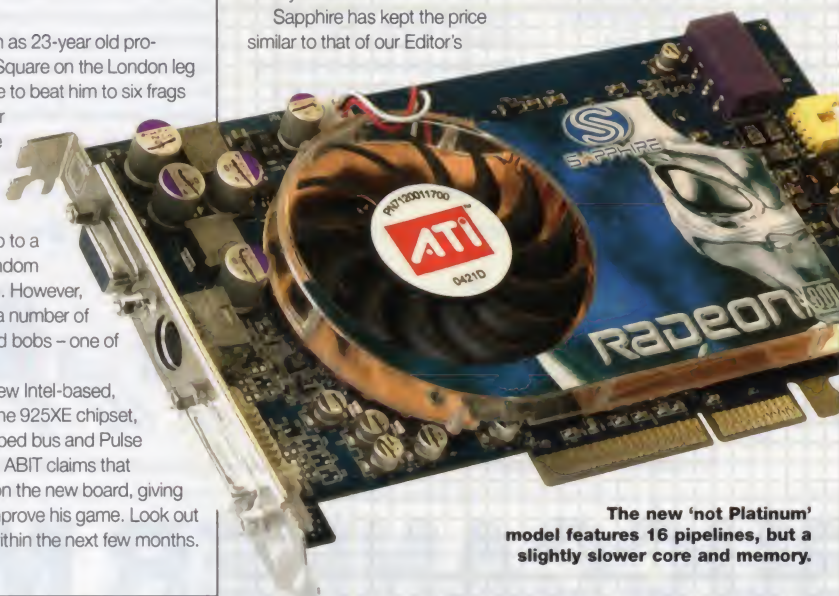
RADEON RANGE GETS XTENDED

New X800 XT sits between X800 Pro and X800 XT Platinum Edition

SAPPHIRE TECHNOLOGY is now selling a Radeon X800 XT card clocked at a 500MHz core and 1GHz memory, making it slightly slower on paper than the 520MHz and 1.12GHz engine of the top rung XT Platinum Edition. Both XT cards have 256MB GDDR3 and a full compliment of 16 rendering pipelines, matching the specifications of the GeForce 6800 Ultra and 6800 GT. AGP 8x and PCI-Express variations will be readily available.

Sapphire has kept the price similar to that of our Editor's Choice 6800 GT at around £350 including VAT, and with performance on a par with the latter NVIDIA card, the Radeon line-up suddenly looks rather muddled. With the 12-pipeline X800 Pro something of a weakling alongside its GT counterpart – and with the vanilla XT card costing only a few pounds more – the Pro suddenly looks rather obsolete. There's little to recommend it over the newcomer.

The new 'not Platinum' model features 16 pipelines, but a slightly slower core and memory.

INTERNET EXPLODER

Microsoft's browser losing ground to Mozilla

According to recent server stats from CNET News.com, visitors with Mozilla browsers jumped to 18 per cent for the first two weeks in September, up from a mere 8 per cent in January.

Security-conscious users have been the first to ditch Microsoft's browser, and more mainstream users are following suit. This is despite a raft of improvements and new features ushered in by XP Service Pack 2.

The Mozilla Foundation has found it hard to gain support among Web regulars, but holes in Internet Explorer have done wonders for its credibility over the last six months. www.mozilla.com

DRIVER WATCH

ON THE DVD

Need a patch? Take a look to see if you're behind the times

MOTHERBOARD

MANUFACTURER	NAME	DESC	RELEASED	SIZE	WEB
Intel	INF Update Utility	6.0.1.1002	7-May-04	1.5MB	support.intel.com
NVIDIA	Forceware	4.27	19-Jul-04	20.2MB	www.nvidia.com
VIA	Hyperion 4in1	4.53	16-Aug-04	1.4MB	www.viaarena.com
VIA	Hyperion Pro 64-bit	0.99 Beta	06-Aug-04	2.7MB	www.viaarena.com

GRAPHICS

MANUFACTURER	NAME	DESC	RELEASED	SIZE	WEB	
ATI	Display, Control Panel, WDM	CATALYST 4.9	9-Sep-04	26.0MB	www.ati.com	NEW
NVIDIA	Forceware	61.77	27-Jul-04	12.0MB	www.nvidia.com	

SOUND

MANUFACTURER	NAME	DESC	RELEASED	SIZE	WEB
Creative	Audigy 2 & ZS Driver Update	1-84-50	29-Jul-04	16.6MB	uk.europe.creative.com
M-Audio	Revolution	1.0.2.8	13-Feb-04	10.16MB	m-audio.com

DIMENSION XPS P4 3.4GHZ

■ £2,710 | Manufacturer: Dell | Phone: 0870 1524 649 | www.dell.co.uk

DESKTOP PC

Dell's new XPS range has Alienware set firmly in its sights

FORGET games. Most people want a PC to write letters, do online banking and to buy pirate DVDs from eBay. Most people never thump their keyboard and accuse everyone around them of cheating. Dell knew this early on, and modelled its business on Ford – a dull US giant supplying ordinary people with unexciting products.

Like Ford, Dell bears the name of its founder and has taken just two decades to rank number one in global market-share. So it's not stupid. And, when official statistics stated that gamers represented a significant number of customers, beating box office receipts in terms of financial clout, the company moved quickly to pep up its product line.

It took an existing office machine, tweaked the engine, added a large diameter exhaust and renamed it the Dimension 8300 (issue 140, 86%). It was a right little Cosworth, capable of showing a clean pair of heels to pricier exotics, but it was never going to sell well – not in that colour and not with that badge.

At the same time, Ford announced its new GT40, so Dell announced its third generation XPS. Where the Dimension had been fast but frumpy, the newcomer was designed to look and go like no other.

Eye-catching on the outside and with cutting-edge kit inside, even the case is unconventional, with the PSU situated at the bottom and with a much larger diameter, lower-noise fan where the supply normally is. Up to 4GB of PC4200 DDR2 RAM, Radeon X800 PCI-Express video, SATA RAID, eight USB ports, Audigy 2, 460W power supply and options in the BIOS to change the colour of the case lights, means XPS specifications universally meet or exceed those of every rival.

THIRD TIME UNLUCKY

Trouble is, it doesn't meet or exceed anything in benchmarks. While the XPS leaves its Dimension predecessor choking on dust, overall the machine is noticeably slower than its peers. In Aquamark 3, the 64-bit Athlons with GeForce 6800 Ultras get close to 70,000, where the XPS struggles to reach 60,000. In X2, the AMD/NVIDIA combination is heading for three digits as the XPS is passing 80.

In *Unreal Tournament 2004*, the Athlons are universally 20 per cent faster – a significant difference. There isn't a single score where the Dell is out front, and that's after testing with *three* sets of CATALYST drivers. For me, it's further proof that today's PCs run best with AMD and NVIDIA, not Intel and ATI.

What has the score dipping further is the supplied UltraSharp 1703FP LCD, which, although offering DVI, VGA, four-port USB hub, landscape/portrait pivot and a healthy range of height adjustment, has a 25ms response time and is thus one of the slower screens on the market. Manufacturers are pushing 16ms screens as entry-level for gamers, with 12ms the ideal, and any screen twice as slow is going to look seriously out of date in a year. The 1703FP does a good job of displaying fast action, but my advice would be to ensure you choose a faster screen.

IT'S ALL THERE

As ever, Dell's paid attention to small details and build quality. If you're not bothered that it drags its heels a little in tests, the XPS should be a satisfying product to own. The case is rugged and tidy, with every connection colour-coded, and there are neat ideas all round – the 5.1 speaker connections are 'notched' to prevent you wiring them up incorrectly, and the case door is double-hinged so it doesn't protrude when open, preventing passers-by from snapping it off. If only you could specify an FX-53 and 6800 Ultra – that'd be a really neat idea.

SPECIFICATIONS

HARDWARE

Pentium 4 3.40GHZ
1GB PC4200 DDR2 RAM
256MB PCI-E x16 Radeon X800 XT
1703FP 17-inch UltraSharp flat screen
2 x 250GB HDD RAID 0
12x DVD+R / +RW
Sound Blaster Audigy 2 XPS
Dell 5650 speakers
Microsoft Windows XP Professional

BENCHMARKS ■ PCZ BENCH MULE ■ DEMONITE OVERX64 (ATHLON 64 3200) ■ HYBRID (ATHLON 64 3400) ■ TINY POWER (ATHLON 64 FX-53) ■ ARMARI XB-X800 (ATHLON 64 3400) ■ DELL XPS (P4 3.4)
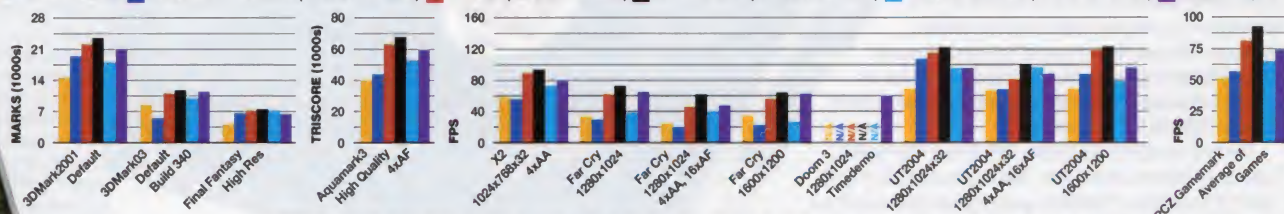
The **COMBINED SCORE** is an average of a number of real-world gaming tests and bespoke benchmarking tools. The **WANDYMARK™** is the combined average score divided by the price.

BUCCANEER M

■ £1,649 | Manufacturer: Lan Pirates | Phone: 01926 745609 | www.lanpirates.co.uk

Is the smallest of the Lan Pirates fleet a speedboat or rowboat?

TOWARDS the end of its marathon testing session, the Buccaneer M began making a plaintive squeaking noise.

LAPTOP PC

Low battery? What? It was horribly late, and somehow I'd managed to install and run every benchmark with the power cable resting about a half-inch from its hole. Not only that, the Ethernet cable was nowhere to be seen, meaning wireless data had been leaping back and forth between the laptop and my network, passing through my dizzy head on the way.

It was a reminder of why I'd grown to like the machine – where the Dell Inspiron 9100 (issue 143, 90 per cent) would be gasping for a drink not half an hour after setting out, the Buccaneer M just keeps going. And going. That's the good news, but as always what manufacturers give with one hand, they invariably take with the other, and the Buccaneer falls down in the crucial benchmarks.
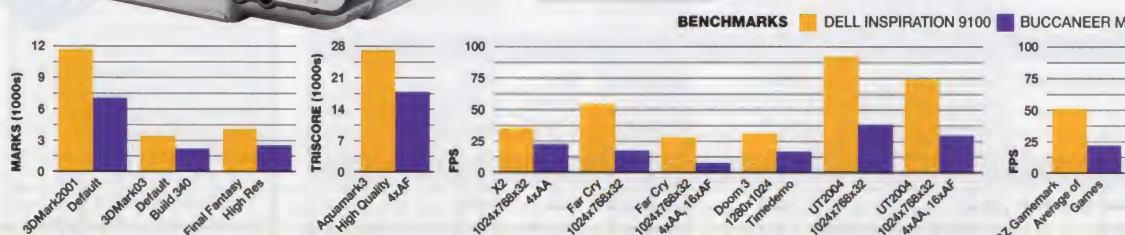
BENCHMARKS ■ DELL INSPIRATION 9100 ■ BUCCANEER M

The **COMBINED SCORE** is an average of a number of real-world gaming tests and bespoke benchmarking tools. The **WANDYMARK™** is the combined average score divided by the price.

PCZONE VERDICT

✔ Top quality product
✔ Attention to detail
✗ Price vs performance
✗ Old-fashioned flat panel

79

The RS Cosworth of desktops

Disappointingly, the scores don't even beat those of last year's Area-51m – and although the Buccaneer runs *Far Cry* and *Doom 3* at a passable pace, you do need to drop the settings to do so. Something you might be loathe to do after spending the best part of two grand.

Unlike the Dell though, the Lan Pirates is not a desktop squeezed into a laptop, but a laptop with a rolled up sock in its pants. An Intel Pentium M processor 755 and Mobility Radeon 9600 (rather than 3.4GHz Prescott and Radeon 9800) means it doesn't quite measure up, and similarly priced rivals from Evesham, Tiny and Rock remain faster.

One thing bothers me though. While the Dell remains the ultimate gaming notebook, I found myself carrying the Buccaneer about far more than I ever did the Inspiron – it's cooler, quieter, lighter and a lot less demanding. It felt like a friend. The build quality is high, the keyboard fast and positive, and there are four USB ports plus FireWire and multi-format card reader. But hang on a minute, I'm against laptops aren't I? Is my journey to the dark side complete?

SPECIFICATIONS

HARDWARE
Buccaneer M
Intel Pentium M 2.0GHz
ATI Mobility Radeon 9600 with TV out
15.4-inch WXGA screen
1GB PC3200 RAM
CDRW/DVD
Intel PRO/Wireless
V.92 modem
Integrated mic and speakers
Windows XP Professional

PCZONE VERDICT

✔ Easy to live with
✔ Marathon battery life
✗ A little pricey
✗ No speedboat

77

Great all-rounder rather than focused gamer

DEAR WANDY

Autumn leaves are falling, but they're not dropping as quick as some of your PCs by the sound of it. Whatever your problem – big, small or gigantic – write in to get a slice of Wandy magic...

■ **AT YOUR SERVICE** Phil Wand

LET IT ALL OUT

Share your techie or gaming-related problems with us and in turn, we may well share them with thousands of readers via these very pages in a big communal love-in type thing. If you have any **top tips** to share with the group, then send them in too: if Wandy's impressed, he'll print them and send you **£50** for your trouble.

Write to Dear Wandy, PC ZONE, Future Publishing, 99 Baker Street, London, W1U 6FP.
Email Address your letters to us at wandy@dearwandy.com with the subject heading 'Dear Wandy'. Please note: while we can assure you that we read absolutely every techie query sent to us, we're unable to offer personal replies. Sorry.

SHORT AND SNAPPY

Q I recently bought an Ei Systems laptop with a 2.4GHz Celeron, 256MB DDR RAM and a 64MB Intel Extreme graphics card. I'd like to upgrade this card, but I have no idea where to look, nor how difficult it will be. I have *Call Of Duty* installed, but it's a bit slow even with all the options turned down, and my copy of *Command & Conquer: Generals* is jumpy.

Chris

A The graphics controller on your laptop is on the motherboard and there's no way you can upgrade it. Recent machines such as the Alienware Area-51m have swappable cards, but most do not. Ei Systems is a Spanish brand now owned by Dixons, so you could contact them. However, the Ei homepage points to the Iberian equivalent of PC World and is useless.

When buying from the high street, search for the brand name before you buy. If the company's homepage is hard to find or doesn't contain driver downloads or FAQ, walk away.

PLAYING IT COOL

Q In January, I decided to build myself a PC. Since then, I've had a few problems with my graphics card – problems which were resolved when I bought a new one. Now I'm having heat problems with my processor. I have an Athlon XP 2800+ with the supplied heat sink and fan, but it appears that the CPU doesn't like heat waves and has been idling at 60-degrees – it stays there until

The Swiftech MCX462-V works wonders for AMD Athlon cooling.

HOUSE OF CARDS

Q I've just purchased my first PC, an AMD Athlon XP 2700+, 512MB RAM and a 256MB Radeon 9200 Atlantis. I want to know if it would be worth buying a top-of-the-range graphics card or would I be wasting my money? I'd like to make it as good as possible for playing games!
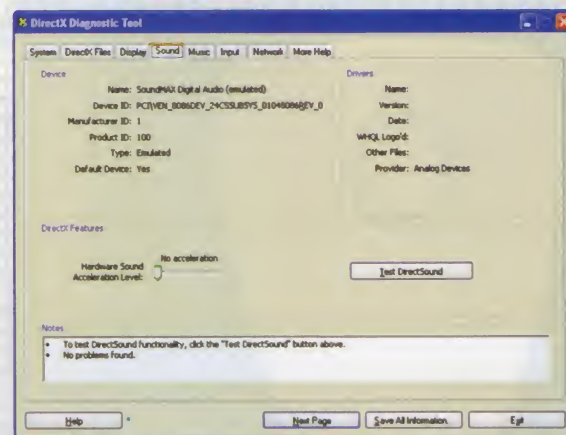
Gillian Sloan

A Your 9200 is definitely the weakest link and you'd be wise to say goodbye to it. However, the top-of-the-range graphics cards are often limited by the size of your CPU, so unless you plan on upgrading your processor within the next 12 months, I'd satisfy yourself either with a Radeon 9800 XT, now available for less than £200, or a plain vanilla GeForce 6800 for a touch more.

After that, I'd spend whatever's left over on 512MB RAM – Steve Hayden wrote in with the results of his *Far Cry* experiments and revealed that in a middling system, memory has almost as big an impact on the game as the video card.

If you experience sound problems, it's always worth dropping the hardware acceleration level to see if the problems vanish.

I get my industrial fan out of the cupboard and cool it down to 50-degrees.

So, I need help finding a new heat sink/fan (HSF). I'm too lazy to look myself, so with my brawn and your brain, I'm sure we can work something out. I want an HSF that will keep my processor icy cold – I don't care how loud it is (as long as it doesn't sound like a jet engine). Basically, I want top-notch cooling with a reasonable level of noise.

Peter Radford

A The heat sink I use on my workhorse Pentium 4 is Swiftech's fine-looking MCX series, and the MCX462-V variant will suit Socket A chips such as your Athlon XP very nicely. Chillblast.co.uk stocks the chunky MCX sinks at around the £45 mark; the company supplied me with mine and I've been delighted with it. Don't worry about the Socket 462 requirement listed on the MCX462-V – for reasons I'm unaware of, Swiftech insists on referring to Socket A as Socket 462, and doubtless loses a few sales in doing so.

Now you need a fan to go with it. The Swiftech website is helpful here (www.swiftech.com), listing a number of 80mm and 92mm

fans, together with their noise levels and airflow.

Although not listed, my two favoured brands are Papst and Sanyo Denki – the latter huffs cold air into a RAID server, and the former punts air across a Zalman Flower in the old Wandybox. My suggestion would be to hunt down a medium power (30-35 CFM) Sanyo-Denki 80mm fan, and perhaps buy two or three of them – one for your sweaty processor, and the others for the case. The fact that a desk fan manages to knock ten degrees from the CPU's temperature suggests that proper case cooling should be the first thing you fix.

DOOM IN THE DUMPS

Q I've just bought *Doom 3*. Everything is great except the sound – it doesn't work. It works fine in my friend's PC, so I thought it could have been my onboard sound. I bought a Creative Sound Blaster and installed it, but still no joy. This is mighty strange as all my other games are fine.

I have an Asrock K7S8X motherboard, 1GB DDR333 RAM, a Radeon 9800 Pro, AMD Athlon XP 2800+ with Windows XP Pro.
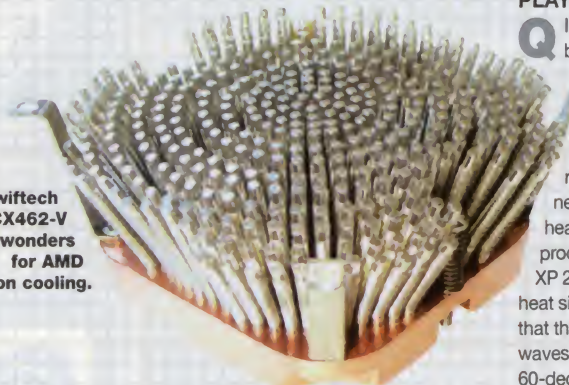
PU3

"If the company's homepage is hard to find, or doesn't contain driver downloads or FAQ, just walk away"

> ## "As with most computer components, it's so often true that the cheaper they are, the weaker they are"

Antec's NeoPower 480 retails for over £100, yet power supplies of an equivalent rating are available for around £20.

A Many gamers are experiencing similar problems, ranging from crackling and disappearing sound to no sound at all – as yet, there seems to be no common ground between them. At the outset, it appeared the nForce2 chipset was at fault, but as more people bought the game and ran into grief, it became apparent that the NVIDIA product wasn't to blame.

In fact, the problem stems from the audio engine being new and developed in-house by id Software. It has no support for hardware acceleration and no support for EAX Advanced HD or other technologies, because id would be required to license them.

Now, while you can try any number of tweaks to cure this problem, I should explain that with Creative having recently announced that it's working with id Software to add EAX support, and with id Software soon to release a first patch for the game, your best bet is to leave your system as it is. If you're really desperate to play, there are a few things you can experiment with.

The first is to run the DirectX Diagnostic Tool by clicking Start, then Run, typing 'DXDIAG' and then slapping the return key. Select the Sound tab and drop hardware acceleration down to nothing.

The next thing to do is open the Sounds and Audio Devices control panel, ensure your audio card is listed for sound playback in the Audio tab, then click the Advanced button on the Volume tab. Experiment with different speaker configurations, including desktop, surround and 5.1.

If you don't have any luck, fear not: the disappearing audio problem will be dealt with in the upcoming patch. In the meantime, keep checking www.doom3.com.

MORE POWER

Q After reading Martin Hammond's problem with his PC in issue 146, I realised the problem he has. I have an Asus A7N8X-X, Crucial RAM, AMD XP 3000+ CPU and a GeForce FX 5900XT card, also running Windows 2000 with SP4.

After building this system, I discovered I could only play old or low-res games – whenever I tried running *Painkiller*, *Ground Control II* or *Perimeter*, I got flickering screens, lock-ups and random reboots.

After much research, I discovered that all my problems were due to an old 300W power supply. I went to ebuyer.com and bought a 500W for £25 and can now run the previously mentioned games with all options set on high. I hope this helps Martin and others.
Jim Wood

A It's something Martin should try. I was amazed at some of ebuyer.com's PSU prices – for example, it has a 600W product on offer for just £20 plus VAT. I mean, twenty quid? That's almost too low to be true: I'd expect a supply of that rating to cost five times that amount.

And here's an interesting tale. About six months back, a colleague of mine was having all manner of peculiar problems with his XP box, mostly random crashes and reboots. However, because his PSU was over 400W and more than beefy enough for the job, he dismissed it as a possible culprit. On a whim, he changed the unit to an Antec and in an instant the problems disappeared. Just like that.

As with most computer components, it's so often true that the cheaper they are, the weaker they are. Don't buy budget RAM and don't buy budget power supplies – they'll only give you gyp long term. That said, your advice is sound, and my thanks for taking the time to write in.

PEEK-A-BOO

Q I have to fight with my DVD drive in order to get the door open. Sometimes, when I press the button to open the door, it opens about half-way and then starts to close again. The only way to combat this is to keep my finger on the button.

This works most times, but there are occasions when I have a battle with the door, it closing on its own and me having to press the 'open' button three or four times to force it open. This problem showed up months ago and has been getting worse. Any advice?
Paul Boland

A Unfortunately, you don't say what software you're

MORE NEWS FROM THE WORLD OF WANDY

A couple of updates from last month. The first concerns the *Doom 3* timedemo, a clip of the game which reports an average frame-rate at its completion and thus provides a fairly decent way to benchmark your PC. What I said was that the game's engine is throttled to 60fps, and thus there's little point in tweaking if you're already there. That's not strictly true.

To start with, the timedemo clip has the throttle removed, allowing the benchmark to report the true rate of which your machine is capable. Second, there's a console command which removes the cap during normal gameplay (although this does have unpredictable results and isn't recommended). Type com_fixedtic -1 into the console to permit rendering beyond 60fps, with com_fixedtic 0 restoring the limit. If you type com_fixedtic 1, this causes player behaviour to be directly related to your frame-rate – the faster the frame-rate, the faster you move, and vice versa. If you're aware of a console command which removes all the eye candy and replaces it with genuine gameplay, please get in touch.

The second update concerns Norton AntiVirus, which I said did not detect adware. In fact, the PR spin says, ahem, that it does, so I should make myself clearer. My own copy of Norton AntiVirus 2003 never once detected adware, nor a porn dialler which had managed to worm its way onto my machine, and copies of Norton AntiVirus 2004 I've used have reported adware files in the system folder where no such files exist. If you're looking to buy an anti-virus product, or to upgrade your existing tools, Eset's NOD32 is way out front as the best of the lot.
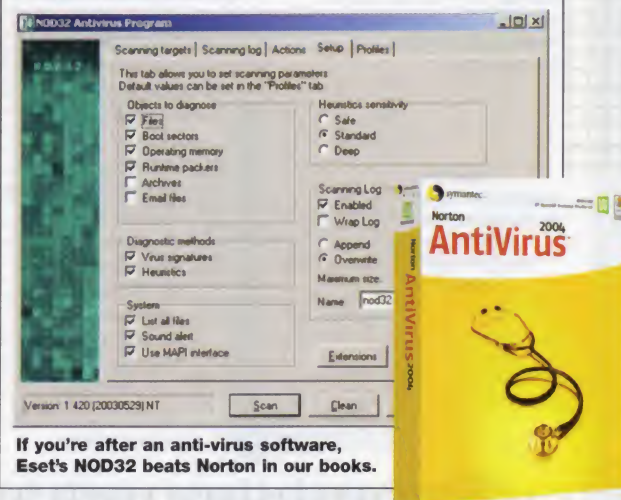
If you're after an anti-virus software, Eset's NOD32 beats Norton in our books.

running. In cases where the DVD drive won't open or where you have to play ping-pong with the mechanism, the most obvious cause is a tray utility, service or other application with an open handle to a file on the drive.

I have a Windows 2000 machine with a CD-ROM and a CD-RW drive installed, both of which are just as recalcitrant as yours. The only way I've found I can make them spit out discs when requested is to close all open applications, exit all tray icons, and then right-click Eject on the drive icon inside Windows Explorer.

Does rebooting make the drive behave? If so, it's almost certain that a third-party tool is 'hogging' your DVD and refusing to let you play with it.

It's impossible to know what's running on your system, but investigate trimming down the number of processes you have running if you have more than 40 shown in Task Manager.

If anyone else has this problem, you may find a number of strange programs firing off when you start Windows, and almost all are unnecessary. Click Start, click Run and type 'MSCONFIG', then return – Microsoft's little System Configuration Utility means you can see and control what happens when Windows starts. If you're unsure about any of the entries, just search on the Internet for them.

Visit Wandy on the Web at www.dearwandy.com

WATCHDOG

Never mind booking in for anger management lessons – if you've been ripped off and are hacked off, just drop us a line to vent your spleen instead...

■ **FIGHTING THE GOOD FIGHT** Adam Phillips

Here's a Jeantech Phong we found earlier, Julian. And no, you can't have it...

"The manufacturer wants to charge £120 for a replacement – which I'm just not paying!"

RON HOOKER IS A MAN WHO WANTS ACTION

THE ACCUSED

ebuyer

PC WORLD
The Computer Superstore

Dixons

GUILTY UNTIL PROVEN INNOCENT

P.S.

A simple rule of economics is supply and demand. Or in this case, demand and damn well supply, will you?! Reader Julian Smith has been trying to buy a Jeantech Phong PC case from PC World for three weeks, but to no avail. "I've tried the Teeside, Leeds, York, Rotherham and Sheffield PC World stores, but none have it in stock," says an exasperated Julian. "The Rotherham and Sheffield branches have it on display but won't let me buy one of those."

Now, he could have bought it from the company via the Web, but Julian didn't want to pay delivery charges. So PC World, can't you find him a case lurking in one of your stores?

"We apologise for Mr Smith's problems trying to find the Jeantech Phong PC case in stock at PC World," says a spokesperson. "We've contacted Mr Smith directly and offered a gesture of goodwill which we believe he's happy with." Needless to say, Julian, you should be in the middle of building your new *Doom 3*-enabled PC as you read this...

HALF (BATTERY) LIFE

We all love the idea of laptops. Until recently though, it was nigh-on impossible to get one with a good enough graphics card to run a 3D game with any

Ron Hooker's battery was beginning to show its age...

Would any company out there care to explain why there's such a big difference between delivery costs?

kind of respectable frame-rate. Yes, that's in the process of being solved, but one thorn plugged into the side of laptops remains – the humble battery.

You can have the best notebook in the world but alas, the manufacturers still haven't managed to crack the old power-on-the-move conundrum – whether it be how long it lasts on said move, or how long the battery retains power over the months before you have to splash out on a new one.

Enter reader Ron Hooker: "I bought a laptop from Dixons and have had it for nine months," he explains. "Then the thing started shutting down after about 15 minutes, not keeping its charge."

So Ron phoned up Dixons' careline, only to be told the warranty was handled by the manufacturer directly – alas though, he was told by the makers that the battery only had a six-month warranty, leaving Ron stuck with a duffer.

None too happy, Ron phoned Dixons, who agreed that his particular laptop did have a 12-month warranty when it was sold to him, and that the manufacturer must have

changed its terms and conditions. "But the manufacturer wants to charge me £120 for a replacement – which I'm not paying! Can you help turn my desktop back into a laptop again?"

Why, of course we can Ron – over to Dixons.

"We're sorry for any inconvenience caused to Mr Hooker having problems sourcing a replacement battery for his laptop," said a spokesperson for the company. "We've helped him source a replacement battery

through Partmaster, which is now on order for Mr Hooker."

VIVE LE REPUBLIC!

In issue 146, reader Steven Corry was spitting chips at having to pay over the odds to the likes of E-Buyer to deliver to his home in Northern Ireland. While a delivery charge might stand at £1.99 on the mainland, Irish residents can pay up to £15.

Now we've got another miffed reader Ken Whelan, who thought we were making out that the Republic of Ireland was part of the UK, when it's not. Sorry if we didn't make that clear...

However, Ken was also happy to offer his views on said pricey situation – and to state that on his side of the border, they get an even worse deal: "Because we live in the Republic, a lot of UK vendors hike up shipping costs – yet they can send the same items to Northern Ireland for a fraction of the shipping cost," fumes Ken.

"The annoying part of this is that most of the shipments come in through Dublin port or Dublin airport, and are then transported by road through the Republic until they reach their destination in Northern Ireland."

Frustrating indeed. So come on E-Buyer, what's your take on this great price divide? PCZ

BUYER'S GUIDE

You might not need it, but you know you want it. Upgrade now and feel the instant pleasure...

Whether you want a new graphics card, motherboard or joystick, this is where to look to find the best on the market. Editor's Choice is the class champ, the product that will satisfy no matter what you play. Our Recommended product wears a silver medal, not quite as triumphant as the outright winner, but a worthy alternative.

Finally, the Also Consider product is one we believe you should look at too before making your final decision. If you feel we've got something wrong, missed out a great product or just want to add your own words of wisdom, mail letters@pczone.co.uk. If we act on your suggestion, we might even send you a gift. We're nice like that.
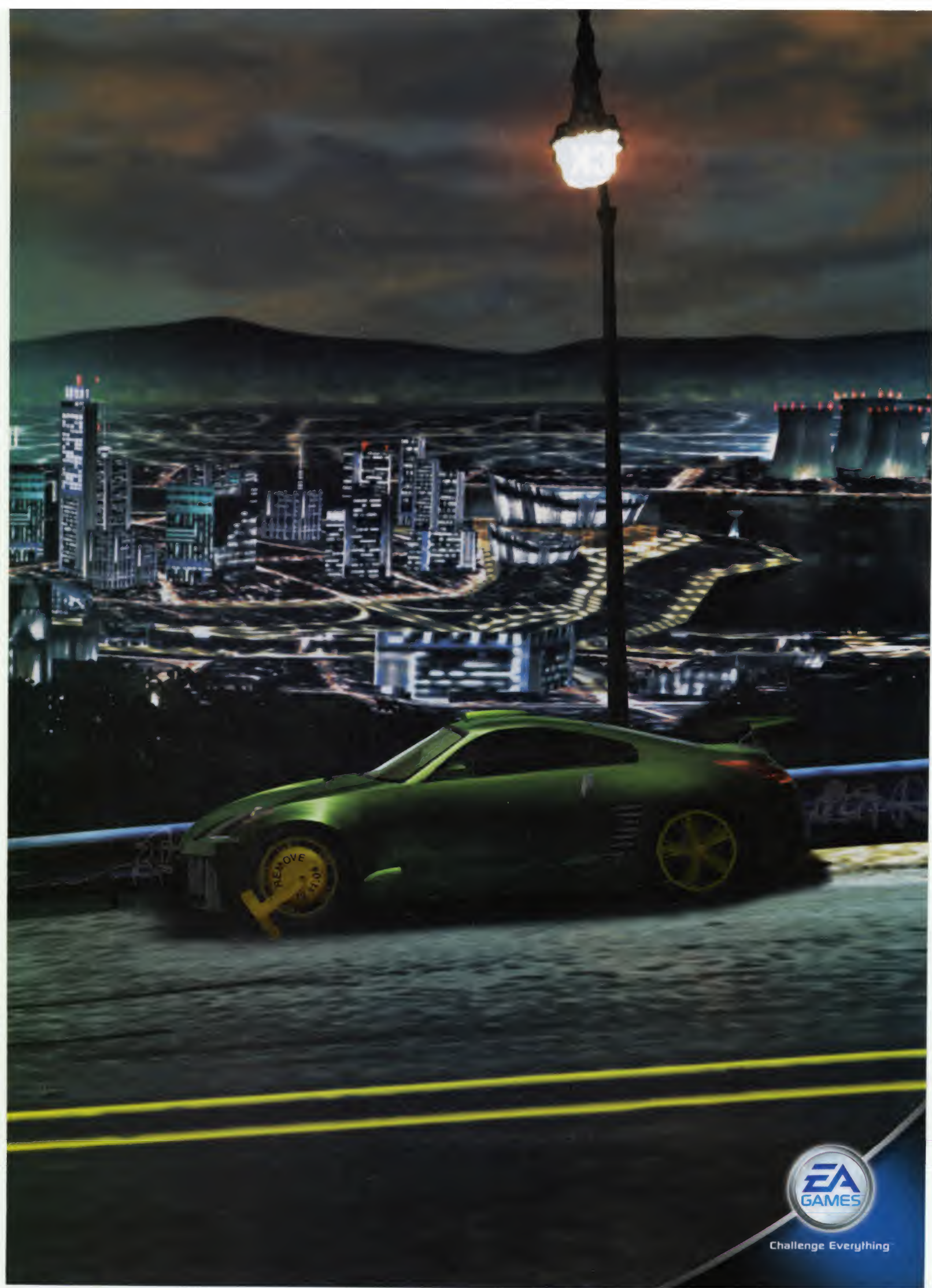
◀ EDITOR'S CHOICE ▶	◀ RECOMMENDED ▶	◀ ALSO CONSIDER ▶

MOTHERBOARDS

IC7
STREET PRICE £74
WAS £79 NOW £74
MANUFACTURER ABIT Computer
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.abit.com.tw
Another solid and modern ABIT board with dual-channel memory configuration, two-channel SATA with RAID, USB 2.0, 800FSB, plus 6-channel audio with S/PDIF. All cables included and it's overclocker-friendly, with a host of tweaking options in the BIOS. If you want high-speed networking, the IC7-G variant includes Intel Gigabit LAN onboard. The downside to these boards is they don't support earlier 400FSB Pentiums.

K8N NEO PLATINUM
STREET PRICE £80
MANUFACTURER MSI
TELEPHONE 020 8813 6688
WEBSITE www.msi.com.tw
With AMD's 800MHz HyperTransport bus at its core, the K8N Neo Platinum is ideal for Athlon owners wanting to find a solid home for their 64-bit chips. As with many rivals, the MSI mobo features dynamic overclocking, but on this particular nForce3 250 board it actually seems to work, delivering 10-15 per cent additional thrust without you having to raise a finger. The downside is that it lacks SoundStorm 7.1 support.

875PNEO-FIS2R (INTEL)
STREET PRICE £97
MANUFACTURER MSI
TELEPHONE 020 8813 6688
WEBSITE www.msi.com.tw
A high-end P4 Canterwood board, the Neo has some remarkable features, including dynamic overclocking – the hardware jumps on the throttle the moment you open apps – and automated BIOS updates using MSI's own Live Update software. Other features include IEEE 1394 FireWire, six-channel audio, onboard LAN and support for Dual DDR. Build quality and packaging are excellent too.

PROCESSORS

P4 3.2GHZ
STREET PRICE £157
WAS £183 NOW £157
MANUFACTURER Intel
TELEPHONE 01793 403000
WEBSITE www.intel.com
Processor prices are plummeting, and the 3.2GHz can now be yours for just over 150 nicker. Hyper-threading delivers a jaw-pounding, double-whammy power hit that pushes benchmark scores well ahead of the equivalent Athlon, and an 800MHz front-side bus paired with the right memory makes its presence felt. If you've got a P4 motherboard, chances are you're already set for an upgrade to remember.

ATHLON XP 3200+ 400FSB
STREET PRICE £97
WAS £135 NOW £97
MANUFACTURER AMD
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.amd.com
No, it's not as punchy as the hyper-threaded Pentium, but it's got a great price tag. Earlier 333FSB chips can be had for around the £100 mark, but with an nForce2 or better chipset and DDR400 memory, you can enjoy the speed boost from more recent XP chips. If you want to build a low-cost, high-power PC, get a cooking video card and the AMD chip will do you proud.

P4 2.8GHZ
STREET PRICE £130
MANUFACTURER Intel
TELEPHONE 01793 403000
WEBSITE www.intel.com
We previously recommended Intel's 2.4GHz 800FSB chip, but recent price slicing means the 2.8GHz chip now makes most sense. Coupled with a decent motherboard, some top-class memory and an FX 5700 Ultra or Radeon 9600XT, you'll have a machine that's muscular enough to tackle all the latest games. If you're building a home games network and want big machines for hardly any money, look no further.

HDDS

WD1200JB 120GB
STREET PRICE £57
MANUFACTURER Western Digital
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.westerndigital.com
You may well view a 120GB HDD as an extravagance, but with games getting longer and broadband getting wider, a hangar-like hard drive gives you plenty of room for mucking about. You'll also bring that never-ending quest for more room to an abrupt end. The price is just right, and the performance second to none. Like the DiamondMax Plus9, the WD1200JB features an 8MB cache and a speed of 7200RPM.

DIAMONDMAX PLUS9 80GB
STREET PRICE £44
MANUFACTURER Maxtor
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.maxtor.com
The mid-sized Maxtor is for everyone: large, fast and not that pricey. 80GB is more than adequate for work, play and downloading requirements, and if you're greedy for more gig you can jump up a size. The Fast ATA, 7200RPM drive includes Maxtor's Shock Protection System and Quiet Drive Technology, but for the Serial ATA version, expect to pay a £20 premium.

RAPTOR 36GB
STREET PRICE £73
MANUFACTURER Western Digital
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.westerndigital.com
If you don't need a deep hole for your data, or if you intend keeping your dirt on a separate drive, the 10,000RPM Serial ATA Raptor makes the ideal foundation for your primary partition. It's wickedly fast, perhaps the fastest HDD available yet, and although designed for server environments, provides gaming desktops with the kind of warp-nine, low access times that make any application more nimble.

GRAPHICS CARD

GEFORCE 6800 GT
STREET PRICE £299
MANUFACTURER XFX Graphics
TELEPHONE 01327 315750
WEBSITE www.xfxforce.co.uk
The release of *Doom 3* means that NVIDIA couldn't have timed its return to the top better. The 6800 GT is a slight step down from its über-Ultra card in terms of performance (only by a few frames per second), but at under £300 it gives you much better value for money. If you can afford the not insignificant outlay, this is the card to buy – and your games will love you forever.

GEFORCE FX 5900 XT 128MB
STREET PRICE £140
MANUFACTURER XFX
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.xfxforce.co.uk
The 5900 XT offers world-beating value – a top banana card packaged up with a mid-range price tag. In benchmarks, the 5900 XT is so far out front on power, it's snapping at the heels of big boys like the 9800 Pro. If you want the card that offers more frames per second per pound than any other, look no further. AGP is on its way out with a bang.

RADEON 9800XT 256MB
STREET PRICE £191
MANUFACTURER ASUSTeK Computer
WEBSITE www.asus.com
With mainstream cards hogging the two front pews, it's only fair we give some space to the fastest card on the market: the world's best presented prize-fighter, the ASUS Radeon 9800XT. If you're lucky enough to have the requisite 300 quid burning a hole in your pocket, why settle for anything less? You even get a coupon for *Half-Life 2*, redeemable when the game's released.

SOUNDCARDS

REVOLUTION 7.1
STREET PRICE £90
MANUFACTURER M-Audio
TELEPHONE 0871 7177 100
WEBSITE www.maudio.co.uk
Although it lacks a few of its rivals' gamer-friendly features, including hardware DirectSound and a joystick/MIDI port, the Revolution more than makes up for any deficit with a truly astonishing quality of sound. Unique technologies enhance your enjoyment of games, music and movies. The software is straight-talking and boasts a familiar look and feel, making the card a delight to work with.

AUDIGY 2 ZS
STREET PRICE £67
MANUFACTURER Creative Labs
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com
A quantum leap from its predecessor, the Audigy 2 offers a boggling range of pro-gamer and DVD features, including 6.1 surround sound, EAX Advanced HD, Advanced Resolution DVD-Audio and 24-bit/96KHz recording – it was the first card to gain THX certification from LucasFilm. If you appreciate the immersive experience offered by high-fidelity surround sound, the Audigy gives you an experience like no other.

AUDIGY 2 ZS PLATINUM PRO
STREET PRICE £144
WAS £159 NOW £144
MANUFACTURER Creative Labs
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com
With the same core features as its little brother, the Platinum Pro is guaranteed to perform and sound like no other. The external breakout box is a boon for serious listeners, including standard audio connections and volume controls. The big Platinum also offers dual SB1394 firewire ports and optical links, a stereo RCA input, plus MIDI In and MIDI Out mini-DIN sockets.

◄ EDITOR'S CHOICE ►	◄ RECOMMENDED ►	◄ ALSO CONSIDER ►	

MX500
STREET PRICE £34
MANUFACTURER Logitech
TELEPHONE 020 7309 0127
WEBSITE www.logitech.com
Although it comes with a tail and doesn't have the same substantive feeling as the battery-reliant MX700, the MX500 remains a solid product and a solid performer in all games. It features Logitech's MX optical engine, mouse wheel (plus two additional buttons either side to aide document navigation), a task-switcher button and two thumb buttons that speed up Web navigation.

OPTICAL MOUSE BLUE
STREET PRICE £17
MANUFACTURER Microsoft
TELEPHONE 0870 6010 100
WEBSITE www.microsoft.com/uk
If you've ever been boggled by the number of buttons on a mouse and have fond memories of a time when three-clickers and a wheel were all you needed, Microsoft's blue rodent is the perfect peripheral. It's nice to look at, nice to hold and, as any veteran FPS gamer will tell you, three buttons is all you need. Plus, the latest optical technology means it works anywhere.

MX700
STREET PRICE £47
MANUFACTURER ACTURER Logitech
TELEPHONE 020 7309 0127
WEBSITE www.logitech.com
Sporting the MX optical engine that made Logitech famous with gamers, the MX700 is essentially an MX500 with its tail lopped off. A cradle keeps your desk tidy and acts as a recharger for the unfettered rodent – making the mouse more attractive to people who don't do batteries. However, it's a touch pricey and we remain unconvinced that going cordless is worth the extra stash.

MICE

INTERNET NAVIGATOR
STREET PRICE £21
MANUFACTURER Logitech
TELEPHONE 020 7309 0127
WEBSITE www.logitech.com
The Internet Navigator lies absolutely flat on your desk, a trademark Logitech design that makes it look sleeker and feel nicer. There's a scroll wheel along the left edge and a raft of customisable function keys to make trawling the Web a cinch – you no longer have to swap back and forth to the mouse, and instead can leave your hands over on the keyboard. Once you browse this way, there's no going back.

INTERNET KEYBOARD
STREET PRICE £15
MANUFACTURER Microsoft
TELEPHONE 0870 6010 100
WEBSITE www.microsoft.com/uk
Forget what you've learned about Microsoft software – its hardware is always of a high build quality and, despite problems with early Intellimouse rodents, very durable. Shortcut buttons you think you'll never use soon become second nature, especially when reconfigured to suit your way of working. And once you learn the enhanced layout, you'll never go back to anything else.

PRO KEYBOARD
STREET PRICE £46
MANUFACTURER Apple
TELEPHONE 0800 0391 010
WEBSITE www.apple.com/uk
If you think we're mad for including an Apple keyboard, think again. Anyone looking for a Rolls-Royce keyboard, and who can live without all the additional buttons, scroll wheels and assorted paraphernalia need look no further. The Apple Pro plugs straight into your USB port and, with the help of third-party utilities, disguises the fact that it was designed for computer illiterates with fewer than two mouse buttons.

KEYBOARDS

CYBORG EVO
STREET PRICE £25
MANUFACTURER Saitek
TELEPHONE 01454 451900
WEBSITE www.saitek.com
A welcome new look for Saitek, with the welcome addition of a four-way adjustable head, larger buttons, plus a meaty damped throttle at the back of the base. As with all Cyborgs, the sculpted hand-rests can be repositioned ambidextrously and suit all hand sizes. An eight-way hat switch, five thumb buttons with trigger, four base buttons and a shift key to double the possible combinations make this a winner.

CYBORG 3D GOLD
STREET PRICE £22
MANUFACTURER Saitek
TELEPHONE 01454 451900
WEBSITE www.saitek.com
A former Best Buy, the Saitek stick is renowned for the way it can be taken apart and put back together to fit your hand perfectly, and also for its ambidextrous nature – lefties as well as righties can get to grips with it. It features seven fire buttons and, like the Sidewinder, has eight hat buttons, a lever throttle and a twist grip for controlling the rudder. At this price, you'd be daft not to.

HOTAS COUGAR
STREET PRICE £249
MANUFACTURER Thrustmaster
TELEPHONE 020 8665 1881
WEBSITE www.thrustmaster.co.uk
The John Holmes of joysticks. Based on the flight controls of an F-16, sturdy metal construction makes it feel like no other peripheral. With 28 customisable buttons, 18lbs of resistance built into its springs, programmable hat switches and an adaptive action for the separate throttle arm, it transforms any flight simulation and is the ultimate toy for wannabe pilots. It's ten times the cost of a regular joystick, but is in a class of its own.

JOYSTICKS

INSPIRE P580 5.1
STREET PRICE £53
MANUFACTURER Creative Labs
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com
We don't like the idea of blowing a ton on speakers, chiefly because the mid-range Creative products are so good. You could spend a little more on a 7.1 set, but you'd lose out on space – and there's little benefit for games players. Instead, stick to the six-speaker P580s, which deliver crisp bass from the subwoofer and a clean, bright sound from the satellites. What's more, this latest design includes a headphone jack too.

Z-640
STREET PRICE £53
MANUFACTURER Logitech
TELEPHONE 020 7309 0127
WEBSITE www.logitech.com
Logitech has patented the pressure-driver design of its subwoofer and we can hear the difference. For the money, the clout is simply amazing – if you're a basshead, you'll love it. Higher frequencies don't disappoint either, the 5.1 sounding almost as clean and inviting as the Inspire 5300s. Unlike the Creative set, the Z-640 has a headphone socket, but it's not conveniently sited. Shame.

MEGAWORKS THX 5.1 550
STREET PRICE £189
MANUFACTURER Creative Labs
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com
Successor to our Best Performance winner, the Megaworks 550 is a stunning 5.1 setup with five 70W capsule-shielded satellite speakers, a 150W wood subwoofer and a wired remote with a separate headphone socket. Built to THX standards, the sound quality is superb in DVDs and games – Creative's BASH system providing 500W of power that make you leap out of your seat.

SPEAKERS

FLATRON L1710B
STREET PRICE £290
MANUFACTURER LG Electronics
TELEPHONE 01753 491500
WEBSITE www.lge.co.uk
This 17-inch panel has finally triumphed and knocked our favourite Hitachi from the top spot, largely due to its price tumbling over £50 recently. The LG boasts superb picture quality and is a speedy little number to boot, making it ideal for gaming. If you're currently weighed down with a monster on your desktop and yearn for a new, slimmer model (don't we all?), then this is the way to go. Yet another nail in the CRT coffin.

CML174SXW
STREET PRICE £340
MANUFACTURER Hitachi
TELEPHONE 01628 585000
WEBSITE www.hitachidigitalmedia.com
When it comes to flat panel, fast-paced gaming, response times really count. And the CML174SXW has one of the lowest response times in its sector – a mere 16ms. It also delivers top-notch image quality, weighs in at just 5kg and comes in colours that match your kit. If you're looking to make the move from CRT, and action games are a priority for you, the handsome little Hitachi is a solid choice.

VISIONMASTER PRO 514
STREET PRICE £398
MANUFACTURER Iiyama
TELEPHONE 01438 745482
WEBSITE www.iiyama.co.uk
Boasting a 22in Mitsubishi Electric DIAMONDTRON tube, 0.24mm AG pitch and flicker-free refresh rates at immense resolutions, the Iiyama is a breathtaking sight on your desktop – not least because it gobbles so much of it. The big VM also has a comprehensive on-screen menu, USB hub and audio connectors. At 1600x1200, the display is rock steady at 110Hz – and so ideal for gaming.

SCREENS

EXTREME PC GAMING HEADSET
STREET PRICE £15
MANUFACTURER Logitech
TELEPHONE 020 7309 0127
WEBSITE www.logitech.co.uk
This fits all the criteria for a gaming headset: it's comfortable (so you can spend hours shouting at your team-mates without feeling you've been cuffed round the ear), the boom comes with an easy-to-position ratchet and it sports a noise-cancelling microphone with excellent voice reproduction. The cable's a bit short, but that's the only drawback – and at this price, it's a steal.

HS300
STREET PRICE £11
MANUFACTURER Creative Labs
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE europe.creative.com
Light and comfortable and with impressive audio considering the rock-bottom price, the Creative HS300's are well worth considering. Sound is rounded, with a decent scoop of bass, and while they can't match the Logitech Extreme for voice quality, your message still comes across loud and clear. If you're strapped for cash, consider these.

AUDIO 90
STREET PRICE £23
MANUFACTURER Plantronics
TELEPHONE 0800 410014
WEBSITE www.plantronics.co.uk
If your life is online gaming, you need a headset you can wear without developing earache – and the Audio 90 is the most comfortable set out of all the ones we've tested. The secret lies in the fact that you can pivot the speakers, which means they sit flush on your ear and block out any outside noise. Not the most stylish set on the market, but eminently functional.

HEADSETS

eagames.co.uk/needforspeed

MAILBOX

Doom, doom, doom. But enough about Mailbox's mood – write in why don'tcha?

■ **ALPHA MAIL** Dave Woods

Quake IV was the big news, but Doom 3 is still a hot topic.

WILL'S A GOOD BOY

Super magazine and an enjoyable read. You might be glad to know that this letter contains no criticism, just a couple of comments and suggestions.

1. I really enjoy reading Will Porter's reviews. His name gets mentioned at work, with respect afforded by everyone. Top man!
2. Can you include a list of the top five console ports? I work with lads who play console games and want to try a few.

3. Keep up the retro stuff. As a mature gamer, I like being reminded of the golden oldies. Could you perhaps add reader reviews to the retro section? PS – Suzie rules!

Stephen Rivett

1. If you enjoy Will's work in *ZONE*, check out back issues of *Country Living* for his monthly column.
2. No plans to include a regular list, but our favourite ports include *Pro Evolution Soccer*, *The Suffering*, *Final Fantasy VII*, and of course, *Halo*.
3. Anything you want to say, retro or otherwise, email us at mailbox@pczone.co.uk.

PANTS

After purchasing and completing *Doom 3*, I have to say your review was spot-on and a great read, so credit to Will Porter. However, it wasn't the review of *Doom* that I immediately flicked to in your last issue. As usual, perhaps somewhat obsessively, I searched for games scoring 50 per cent and below.

You can imagine my delight on reading that *Catwoman* was nothing more than "a mangy specimen" and "a scabby moggy let out of the bag way before its time". Similarly, *Transport Giant* provoked more giggles, as it was described quite poignantly, I thought, as "a giant pain in the arse".

I relish reading reviews of bad games, and I know I'm not the only one to enjoy this smug pleasure in the misfortune of others. As a general rule, the lower the score, the funnier the prose. I can honestly say I've been left damp-eyed by some of the real atrocities which have been unable to escape the all-seeing eye of *ZONE*. Your honest, no-nonsense reporting is what makes your reviews great. For this, I thank you.

David Walsh

Fear not, we shall continue slagging where we see fit. Developers beware…

MAGIC WAND

Dear Wandy, what advice can you give us readers who would like to follow in your footsteps in the near future? By the way, *PC ZONE* is always a great read and all the staff behind it are funny as hell.

Ste

Over to Wandy: "Most importantly, you need to learn to speak binary. To the untrained ear, my vocals might sound like an old Spectrum cassette, but it

Thanks be to god that Konami ported PES to the PC.

takes years of dedication to the hardware cause."

HELLFIRE

I read your *Doom 3* review with great interest – especially the bit about the young work-experience lad who stated that the game didn't look scary. I was that work experience lad.

After reading the review, I decided to buy the game. I sat through the distinctly un-scary installation, turned off the lights and put the sound up on my 5.1 speakers. Six hours later I emerged shaking and drenched in sweat, with the inhuman screams of imps and pinky demons ringing in my ears.

I now realise my mistake and intend to go back and play the original in the dark – the way it was meant to be.

Dominic Ellis

It's true. *Doom 3* in the dark, with headphones/surround sound speakers is super-scary.

CRASH COURSE

"What's this? A challenge from Suzy in the disc pages on the *Juiced* demo."
"Seems like he's looking down his nose at it right now."
"Piece o'cake he's thinking…"
"Sure thing Ted."
"And now he's installed it and loaded it up on his PC."

"Headstrong that lad, Ted."
"Wait… He's Started the race!"
"He has, and it's going lovely, brilliant driving and an evil grin."
"What a winner, first lap in well under time."
"This is a sure Suzy-beater!"
"It certainly is."
"Oh no, wait a minute…"
"What's that?"
"In a frantic effort to do the perfect corner, he's yanked his joypad out of his the PC!"
"A flail of arms, a flying peripheral and the gorgeous Toyota supra has slammed straight into the barrier!"
"At 146mph!"
"But he's carrying on…"
"And that's a respectable sixth position, and a time of three minutes and 42 seconds."
"Nice one Ted."
"Sure thing Dave."
And that's the story direct from the commentators. Don't even get me started on the *D-Day* demo…

Chris Ashby

See page 148 for more challenges from Suzy.
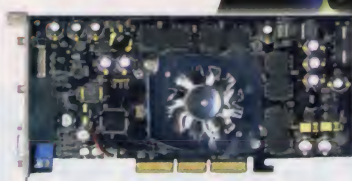
TIMELESS

I've got a collection of games dating back from the present day to the early '90s, and so I've witnessed the quality of PC games through the years. What I've also witnessed is the ever-

Come on, which game would you rather play today? *Far Cry* or *Duke Nukem 3D*?

changing 'Greatest Games' list that's present in your mag, and things don't seem right.

You see, I don't understand why *Far Cry* is ahead of *Half-Life*, *Doom*, *Duke Nukem 3D* (bless), *Blood* and other such games that are far better designed. Increasingly, I'm starting to see masterpieces being removed in place of tarty tat.

I have a theory for all of this though: in order for your mag to stay modern and fresh, and to give reason to the millions of people spending tons of money on hardware, you have to have the flashy, but ultimately average

games up front. The last few 'superior' oldies that remain in the A-list will probably be gone by late 2005.

Michael Smith

Sorry, but are you seriously calling *Far Cry* an average game? I suppose you think *Half-Life 2* is nothing but a tarty bit of tat as well? And you've missed the point about our A-List. It's there to act as a buyer's guide, pointing you in the direction of the best games you can buy today.

Duke Nukem 3D was one of the best games ever released in its day, but if you'd rather play that than *Far Cry* today,

you're a crazy man. Some old classics still stand the test of time, like *Grim Fandango*, which is why it's still sitting above new games like *The Suffering*.

HIS MASTER'S VOICE

Pavel Barter's special report on voice-acting ('His Master's Voiceover', issue 146) prompted a bit of mulling. First, Hollywood stars – is there a point?

It's got to be a publicity thing because, as the proliferation of animated movies has shown, with a few exceptions they just aren't worth the money. If you didn't know that Ray Liotta was Tommy in *GTA*, would you have noticed or cared? He probably cost a six-figure sum, so where is Rockstar's return unless there's a publicity angle?

My prize goes to whoever voiced Aribeth de Tylmarande in *Neverwinter Nights* – I was too amazed even to laugh. This person makes a living as an actress?

Bob

Professional voiceovers are a must, but I agree that Hollywood A-Listers who take the money and sleep through the work are a waste of money. And if he's listening, that's not aimed at Ray Liotta by the way.

ABSOLUTELY NOTHING

I've just been playing *Doom 3*, drooling over the graphics so much I didn't even notice the spider violently humping my leg, and I was wondering why the game is so good.

OK, so the graphics caused my jaw to fall through the floor, but graphics aren't everything. The gameplay is sublime, but it doesn't differ from most other FPSs. The sound is of the same high quality, fair enough, but it's not exactly the main attraction of the game. I finally realised that the reason this game is way better than most in its genre is that it has nothing to do with WWII! Long live *Doom 3*.

Killer Mule **PCZ**

"If you didn't know Ray Liotta was Tommy in *GTA*, would you have noticed or cared?"

BOB CAN'T SEE THE POINT OF LUVVIES IN GAMES

▲ *DOOM 3*. GOOD OR EVIL? AFTER LAST MONTH'S FEEDBACK SPECIAL, THE DEBATE RUMBLES ON

Bob_the_insane thinks that it's "basically a good game that the developer has done something a little odd to. You have a great start, great atmosphere, fantastic interface, great engine and beautifully designed levels. And then they put all this around such a linear, daft story. A story which was appropriate for the technology available in 1994, but compared to its peers today is just lame." But then, with a name like that, would you trust anything he said? **Bagsabbis** did. "I've given *Doom 3* a rest. It's great fun, but only in small doses – and I still think *Far Cry* is the better all-round shooter so far this year." **Lupe101** couldn't even agree with himself. "On the one hand, this is the best-looking and most polished game I've ever played. It's the most visually realistic FPS ever created. On the other hand, I got bored about halfway through – the only thing that kept me going was the promise of hell."

And the theme continued with **K3rm**it. "It's not the best game I've played, but with the lights down and headphones on, it scores a 'streaky pants, I'm not sleeping sound tonight, 8.5 out of 10'." And **G-Man_007** agrees. "Great game, worth the wait, yet flawed all the same. I haven't been quite this scared since *Clive Barker's Undying*, but the AI is suspect and some of the weapons are a bit weak. It's worth 80-85 per cent and £30 of anyone's money. Will was a little too generous with the score if you ask me, but spot-on with the review. Essential purchase."

And some of you can't get enough. Like **chrisb100**. "I got back from holiday recently, with *ZONE* on the doormat next to a pre-ordered copy of *Doom 3*. I read the review, played it for a few hours and I'm happy. Congratulations to id for such a terrific game. It's got all the important bits: excitement, tension, big guns and it's FUN!" **leedsfan9** was in total agreement. "To be honest, I much prefer the cramped corridors and having to unlock doors with codes etc over the huge landscapes of *Far Cry*. I didn't complete *Far Cry* and think *Doom 3* is better." Controversial. Unlike **Wildpods** comment: "It's a 'fur coat with no knickers' kind

▼ of game." Surely everyone's favourite...

THE PCZONE A-LIST

◀ SHOOTERS ▶

◀ STRATEGY ▶

FAR CRY

A huge leap for PC gaming, *Far Cry* is also an absolute joy to play. With its long-range combat, shimmering shores, impressive enemy AI and seamlessly integrated physics engine, it's the first shooter to show the potential of next-gen PC titles. The narrative may be slightly iffy, but the tension and exhilaration it instils in you makes the battle against the Trigens and their mercenary creators one of the best shooters in years.
PUB Ubisoft **DEV** Crytek
PCZ ISSUE 140

MEDIEVAL: TOTAL WAR

A sequel to the stunning *Shogun: Total War* (now available on budget), *Medieval* offers everything its predecessor did and a whole lot more. Adding to the massive 3D battles and turn-based *Risk*-style strategy map are a multitude of new options, both diplomatic and military. Breathtaking in every way, strategy games just don't come any better than this.
PUB Activision
DEV The Creative Assembly
PCZ ISSUE 120

DOOM 3
Technologically dazzling, genuinely shock-providing and resolutely back to basics: *Doom 3* may not bring anything new to the FPS table, but it's still a stunning thrill-ride that every PC gamer should sample.
PUB Activision **DEV** id software
PCZ ISSUE 146

CALL OF DUTY
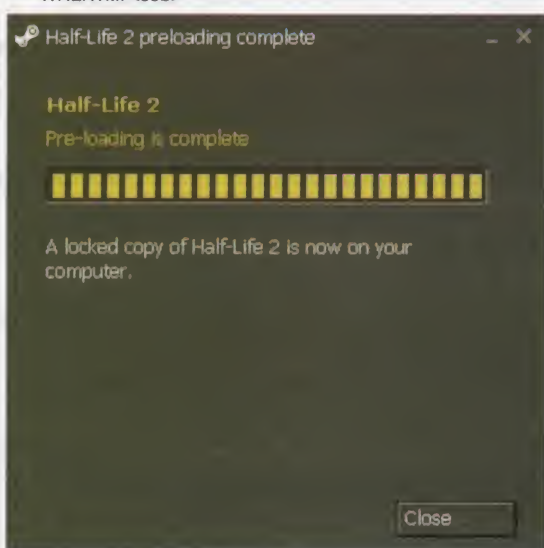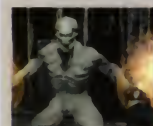With an excellent expansion in the form of *United Offensive*, *Call Of Duty* remains the best war game on the PC – and possibly all of all time. Constantly managing to mix up feelings of dread and excitement, it's an absolute must-play.
PUB Activision **DEV** Infinity Ward
PCZ ISSUE 136

MAX PAYNE 2
It's Payne! Slicker than slick, breathtaking and quite beautiful, *Max Payne 2* provides the greatest gaming kicks that money can buy. It's extremely short, but so tense and well-designed that you just won't care.
PUB Rockstar Games **DEV** Remedy
PCZ ISSUE 136

TRIBES: VENGEANCE
NEW ENTRY A generation-leaping storyline and some silky skiing and sliding slot this remoulding of the online favourite firmly into these hallowed pages. It's a brilliant and original game, even if a few levels are slightly lacklustre.
PUB VU Games **DEV** Irrational Games
PCZ ISSUE 147

NO ONE LIVES FOREVER 2
Style, stealth and magnificent set-pieces are the order of the day in this excellent spy sequel. It looks brilliant, it's well designed and is genuinely funny. What's more, it doesn't treat you like an idiot.
PUB Black Label Games **DEV** Monolith
PCZ ISSUE 122

HALF-LIFE: GENERATIONS
Unchallenged for three years, *Half-Life* redefined its genre with a cracking atmosphere and a compelling plot. It now comes bundled with the excellent *Opposing Force* add-on pack and the world's favourite mod, *Counter-Strike*.
PUB Vivendi **DEV** Valve Software
PCZ ISSUE 71

UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2004
It may be a multiplayer game, but the superb bots of *UT2004* still grab it a place in the PC ZONE solo-shooter hall of fame. It's quite simply the greatest deathmatch experience money can buy.
PUB Atari **DEV** Digital Extremes
PCZ ISSUE 138

MAFIA
From the makers of *Hidden & Dangerous* and just as compelling, this game borrows from every great gangster film ever made. Tense missions, superb atmosphere and great AI – it's a classic in every respect. Badabing!
PUB Take 2 **DEV** Illusion
PCZ ISSUE 119

JEDI KNIGHT: JEDI ACADEMY
The latest saber 'em up from the Lucas stable is an absolute winner; think fights with Boba Fett, double-ended lightsabers, customisable characters and even the opportunity to turn to the Dark Side. Ace.
PUB Activision **DEV** Raven
PCZ ISSUE 133

RISE OF NATIONS
One of the most addictive and satisfying strategy games to land on our desks in ages. Its unique perspective, great gameplay and, now, its excellent expansion *Thrones And Patriots* make it hugely deserving of our prestigious Classic award.
PUB Microsoft **DEV** Big Huge Games
PCZ ISSUE 129

SOLDIERS: HEROES OF WWII
The strategy of *Commandos* meets the fun of *Cannon Fodder* in this top-down game of tactics and warfare. Being the underdog has never been so much fun, and the rumbling of distant tanks never so worrying.
PUB Codemasters **DEV** Best Way
PCZ ISSUE 144
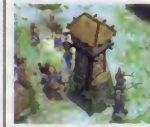
AGE OF MYTHOLOGY
The *Age Of* series goes 3D in Ensemble Studios' best strategy outing to date. Great gameplay, superb attention to detail and a strong storyline give this an unparalleled sense of atmosphere. In addition, it boasts a decent map editor.
PUB Microsoft **DEV** Ensemble Studios
PCZ ISSUE 123

REPUBLIC: THE REVOLUTION
This highly original take on the machinations of political upheaval in Eastern Europe has split gaming opinion down the middle, but we think it's a fascinating, educating and unique piece of gaming history.
PUB Eidos Interactive **DEV** Elixir Studios
PCZ ISSUE 132

WARRIOR KINGS: BATTLES
Warrior Kings was one of the most compelling and diverse RTS games we'd seen. This second chapter, which focuses around skirmish play, offers more units, varied tech trees and challenging AI generals.
PUB Empire Interactive **DEV** Black Cactus
PCZ ISSUE 128

GROUND CONTROL II: OPERATION EXODUS
Despite a few AI glitches and dull objectives, *GCII* is a great game if you prefer tactics to boring old resource management. A superb sci-fi effort with some intense freeform missions – strat-fans should check it out.
PUB VU Games **DEV** Massive Entertainment
PCZ ISSUE 143
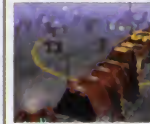
WARHAMMER 40,000: DAWN OF WAR
NEW ENTRY An old school charmer with some flash visuals, varied units and super-flash presentation: what *Dawn Of War* loses in dull AI it wins through with sheer orcish belligerence. Multiplayer is pretty smart too.
PUB THQ **DEV** Relic
PCZ ISSUE 147
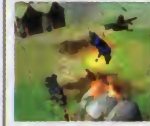
EMPIRES: DAWN OF THE MODERN WORLD
The latest to fall off the *Age Of Empires* lorry may not innovate, but there's a good variety of nations with accurate historical spins (General Patton, Richard the Lionheart etc), as well as novel unit types and well-written campaigns.
PUB Activision **DEV** Stainless Steel Studios
PCZ ISSUE 135

COMMANDOS 2
There have been a few imitators of the squad-based strategy of *Commandos* but none have come close to this sequel. If, like us, you loved the first game, you'll love this massive and preposterously detailed follow-up even more.
PUB Eidos **DEV** Pyro Studio
PCZ ISSUE 108

Welcome to the *PC ZONE* A-List, home to the greatest games in the land. To gain entry to these hallowed pages, a title has to the best of the best in their respective genre. Jubilant new entries this month include *Tribes: Vengeance*, *Dawn Of War*, *Evil Genius*, *The Sims 2* (no, really), *Juiced* and *Full Spectrum Warrior*...

◀ ROLE-PLAYING GAMES ▶

KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC

The best RPG to appear for five whole years, and the best *Star Wars* game to surface in ten. *Knights Of The Old Republic* manages to develop the franchise more than even Lucas's cinematic efforts ever could. With beautiful graphics, a gripping plot, oodles of Force powers and supreme character development, this is proof, if ever it were needed, that Bioware is one of the best development houses on the planet.
PUB Activision **DEV** Bioware
PCZ ISSUE 137

DEUS EX
Great sci-fi plot, amazing attention to detail and unparalleled player freedom: combining the finer elements of *Half-Life*, *System Shock 2* and *Thief*, *Deus Ex* is an RPG of complex beauty and a true revolution in computer gaming.
PUB Eidos **DEV** Ion Storm
PCZ ISSUE 93

THE ELDER SCROLLS III: MORROWIND
One of the most impressive RPGs we've seen in years. A massively open-ended world full of beautiful visuals, superb depth of gameplay and innovative character development make this a classic that will keep you totally absorbed.
PUB Ubisoft **DEV** Bethesda Softworks
PCZ ISSUE 117

NEVERWINTER NIGHTS
The maker of the epic *Baldur's Gate* series proves it's still a leading force in the world of RPGs with this glorious hardcore 3D adventure. It features great single and multiplayer options, along with a very accessible toolkit.
PUB Atari **DEV** Bioware
PCZ ISSUE 118

PLANESCAPE: TORMENT
An incredible game from Black Isle, using the *Baldur's Gate* engine. With a compelling story, well-scripted dialogue and the best character development we've seen in any game of its kind, this is a dark, adult scorcher of an RPG.
PUB Interplay **DEV** Black Isle Studio
PCZ ISSUE 87

DUNGEON SIEGE
Graphically brilliant, massively enjoyable and highly immersive, *Dungeon Siege* is one of the best RPGs to date and only misses out on a Classic award because of the shortcomings in the narrative.
PUB Microsoft **DEV** Gas Powered Games
PCZ ISSUE 115

SYSTEM SHOCK 2
Definitely one of the most original and disturbing games to hit the PC, *System Shock 2* manages to successfully mix the genres of role-playing, action and adventure into one. Play it with the lights off if you're hard enough.
PUB EA **DEV** Irrational Games
PCZ ISSUE 80

BALDUR'S GATE II
The original *Baldur's Gate* was hailed as one of the best story-driven role-playing games ever. The sequel isn't vastly different, but it's bigger, better and still extremely addictive. If PC role-playing's your thang, this is essential.
PUB Interplay **DEV** Bioware
PCZ ISSUE 96

DEUS EX: INVISIBLE WAR
It's had most of its role-playing elements sucked out and developed a strong console bias, but the gripping plot and action remain intact. It wasn't the revolution we wanted, but it's still a worthwhile purchase.
PUB Eidos **DEV** Ion Storm
PCZ ISSUE 137

DIVINE DIVINITY
This epic RPG contains the action of *Diablo II* combined with the storyline of the *Baldur's Gate* series, not to mention about 200 hours of gameplay in a huge fantasy world. The name may be a bit silly, but the gameplay is anything but.
PUB CDV **DEV** Larian Studios
PCZ ISSUE 121

◀ ACTION/ADVENTURE ▶

SPLINTER CELL

At long last we've got a new king of the action-adventures with the Tom Clancy-influenced *Splinter Cell*, and a new crown prince of stealth in the form of the über-flexible Sam Fisher. *Splinter Cell* features the perfect blend of action, structure and pace, combined with some of the best visuals and set-pieces around. No self-respecting gamer should miss out on this.
PUB Ubisoft
DEV Ubisoft Montreal
PCZ ISSUE 125

BEYOND GOOD & EVIL
A beautiful game with a myriad of styles that evokes the spirit of *Little Big Adventure*, along with a touch of *Zelda* sparkle. Whether you're fighting government conspiracies or photographing wildlife, it's never dull.
PUB Ubisoft **DEV** Ubisoft
PCZ ISSUE 138
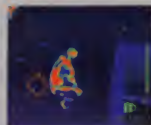
SPLINTER CELL: PANDORA TOMORROW
Two games in one: a set of excellent, if not revolutionary, missions for Sam Fisher coupled with a scintillating spies vs mercs multiplayer mode. Single-player is more of the same, but that's no bad thing is it?
PUB Ubisoft **DEV** Ubisoft
PCZ ISSUE 141

THIEF: DEADLY SHADOWS
Garrett's new adventure is sure to thrill, although you can't help but feel that it's been hampered by console considerations. That said, sublime level design, amazing sound and real scares make it an excellent buy.
PUB Eidos **DEV** Ion Storm
PCZ ISSUE 144

PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE SANDS OF TIME
The fluidity, ingenuity and graphical splendour of *The Sands Of Time* cannot be faulted. Combat may be unsatisfying, but the time-control gimmicks and fast-paced acrobatics put Lara to shame.
PUB Ubisoft **DEV** Ubisoft Montreal
PCZ ISSUE 136

GRIM FANDANGO
If you've followed LucasArts from the early days of *Monkey Island*, *Sam & Max* and *Day Of The Tentacle*, this is a must. The scripting is impeccable, while sublime graphics and brilliant humour ensure it's top of its genre.
PUB Activision **DEV** LucasArts
PCZ ISSUE 71

THE SUFFERING
A survival horror that's refreshingly fast and fluid, *The Suffering* takes place in an Alcatraz-style prison and surprised us with its ingenuity and tension-fused set-pieces. It gets slightly repetitive, but it's worth a ride.
PUB Midway **DEV** Surreal Software
PCZ ISSUE 145

SILENT HILL 2: DIRECTOR'S CUT
Survival horror games have truly come of age with this superbly creepy and atmospheric offering. The (near identical) third game is also out, but for our money this is still the champ. Classy and disturbing.
PUB Konami **DEV** Konami
PCZ ISSUE 126

METAL GEAR SOLID 2: SUBSTANCE
A convincing PC conversion that adds tanker-loads of side-missions, training stages and unlockable characters to the PS2 original. There's too much waffle, but it's still an excellent third-person sneakfest.
PUB Konami **DEV** Konami
PCZ ISSUE 127

SOUL REAVER 2
With narrative and puzzles that *Legacy Of Kain: Defiance* failed to improve on, this instalment of the Raziel saga is well worth a look. Compelling storyline and satisfying combat make it an excellent budget buy, despite the ageing graphics.
PUB Eidos **DEV** Crystal Dynamics
PCZ ISSUE 111

◀ GOD GAMES ▶

BLACK & WHITE

Although it had its critics, we still stand by our original verdict. Peter Molyneux's vision is pure and the design of the game breaks boundaries and serves as a blueprint for the future. The add-on *Creature Isle* is also available, which cuts down on micro-management and enables you to guide your creature through a variety of mini-games. Pure genius in a box.
PUB EA **DEV** Lionhead Studios
PCZ ISSUE 100

CIVILIZATION III
Civilization III sticks to the same compulsive gameplay that made the first two games so popular. Die-hard *Civ* fans will relish the improved visuals and animation, while the new user-friendly interface makes the game accessible to the first-timer. Brings to mind the maxim 'if it ain't broke…'
PUB Atari **DEV** Firaxis Games
PCZ ISSUE 111

EVIL GENIUS
NEW ENTRY It's always more fun being the bad guy, and when you're an insane megalomaniac it's even better. *Evil Genius* awakens the Blofeld inside you, with all the henchmen, lairs and diabolical plans you could ask for. Basic graphics, ace gameplay.
PUB VU Games **DEV** Elixir
PCZ ISSUE 147

THE SIMS 2
NEW ENTRY We still hate *The Sims*, we hate them and everything they stand for, but even we have to admit that the sequel's a good game in itself. We found it addictive and absorbing when we reviewed it – but we'll have changed our tune by the time the fifth expansion pack is dribbled onto the market.
PUB EA **DEV** Maxis
PCZ ISSUE 147

VEGA$: MAKE IT BIG
An in-depth tycoon game with all the 3D graphical glitz and glamour of Vegas itself, *Make It Big* provides hotels, casinos and over-priced magic shows that let you suck the money out of punters' pockets. It can get a little too fiddly, but it looks and plays really well. A *PC ZONE* 'Essential'.
**PUB** Empire Interactive **DEV** Deep Red
PCZ ISSUE 135

SPACE COLONY
Whether you're trying to attract space-tourists or battle neighbouring aliens, taking control of 20 rowdy space colonists and pandering to them makes for a charming and original management jaunt, with plenty of missions to keep you busy for a fair while.
PUB Gathering **DEV** Firefly Studios
PCZ ISSUE 136
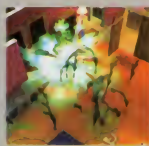
GHOST MASTER
Take your team of ghosts into the town of Gravenville and solve some otherworldly problems, scare a few mortals and bag yourself some new team-mates in this innovative spook 'em up. *Ghost Master* is one of the freshest and funniest games we've seen for a long time.
**PUB** Empire Interactive **DEV** Sick Puppies
PCZ ISSUE 130

EMPEROR: RISE OF THE MIDDLE KINGDOM
This intricate game comes from the same stable as *Zeus* and *Caesar* – and they know a thing or two about city building. There's a massive amount of gameplay and more than 50 missions spanning seven historic campaigns. As well as the economic considerations, you'll have to follow feng shui and the Chinese zodiac.
PUB VU Games **DEV** Breakaway Games
PCZ ISSUE 121
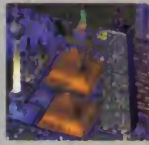
SIM CITY 4
The latest outing of the best-selling city-building sim goes 3D. Unfortunately, there are no huge leaps forwards in gameplay, but there are plenty of features, such as regional cities, imported characters from *The Sims* and a terrain editor to keep you occupied.
PUB EA **DEV** Maxis
PCZ ISSUE 125

DUNGEON KEEPER 2
The ultimate 'it's good to be bad' game, *Dungeon Keeper* was a great idea and *DK2* keeps up the good work. It takes the essence and humour of the original, corrects all the mistakes, vastly improves the graphics and adds a myriad of new features that build wisely on the original concept.
PUB EA **DEV** Bullfrog
PCZ ISSUE 79

◀ MULTIPLAYER MODS ▶

DESERT COMBAT (BF 1942)

What with *Counter-Strike* now available as a full game in the form of *Condition Zero*, *Desert Combat* sits atop the modding tree. A *Battlefield 1942* TC that focuses on the more sandy conflicts of the last decade (scraps like the original Desert Storm or the troubles in Somalia), *Desert Combat* is extraordinarily good, extremely popular and as watertight as the best commercial release. It also provides a great stepping-stone between the original game and the forthcoming Middle-Eastern *Battlefield 2*.
WEB www.desertcombat.com

NATURAL SELECTION (HALF-LIFE)
This superb *Half-Life* mod sees marines squaring off against aliens in various sci-fi environments. With the marines working in teams and the aliens acting like mentalists, the variety in gameplay makes it a sure-fire winner.
WEB www.natural-selection.org

INFILTRATION (UNREAL TOURNAMENT)
A top drawer realism-bound mod for the ageing *Unreal Tournament* warhorse, *Infiltration* takes the familiar terrorist vs counter-terrorist plot and gives it a spin with some amazing weapon loadouts and hugely tense gameplay.
WEB infiltration.sentrystudios.net

THE SPECIALISTS (HALF-LIFE)
Blending *Half-Life* Team Deathmatch with kung-fu, slo-mo gymnastics makes this a must-play mod. With a range of maps and *Matrix*-esque bullet trails, it provides a nice break from the über-realism of *Counter-Strike*.
WEB www.specialistsmod.net

SAS: INTO THE LION'S DEN (UT2003)
A slick and atmospheric good guys vs bad guys mod that oozes class and detail - it's one-shot kills all round, with stamina levels and getting out of puff to add to the realism. He who dares, frags.
WEB www.sas.jolt.co.uk

◀ MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER ▶

EVERQUEST

EverQuest keeps going from strength to strength and now has a total of seven expansion packs. One of the best of these, *Planes Of Power*, provides a multitude of simplifications to help newcomers, while adding lots of new worlds for high-level characters to explore. It's a truly beautiful and captivating game that has claimed the souls and social lives of thousands of people the world over.
PUB Ubisoft **DEV** Sony Online Entertainment
PCZ ISSUE 117
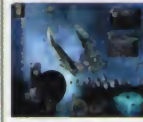
EVE ONLINE
Eve Online is as beautiful as it is complex, oozing style from every pixel. Choose from four unique races and explore the *Eve* universe with its unparalleled scope for adventure, interaction and trade.
PUB Crucial **DEV** CCP
PCZ ISSUE 130

ANARCHY ONLINE
A beautiful MMOG with detailed environments and a huge selection of armour and weapons, *Anarchy Online* is an immersive title. Many of the bugs have been ironed out and the latest update offers a slick gaming experience.
PUB Funcom **DEV** Funcom
PCZ ISSUE 114

STAR WARS GALAXIES: AN EMPIRE DIVIDED
Despite a shaky start, *SWG* is now thriving – partly down to the addition of vehicles, Jedi and player housing, and partly because *Star Wars* fans are loyal as dogs. The *Jump To Lightspeed* expansion should boost things further.
PUB Activision **DEV** Sony Online Entertainment
PCZ ISSUE 138

DARK AGE OF CAMELOT
The alternative to *EverQuest* with a loose basis in European mythology and three-way PvP realm combat, this is also a beardy version of *PlanetSide*. Recent graphical updates have breathed new life into it.
PUB Mythic Entertainment **DEV** Mythic Entertainment
PCZ ISSUE 142

UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2004

A fleshed out, revamped UT offering that far exceeds both its predecessors and our expectations. Extra game modes, superb vehicles plus inspired weapons and features make this one of the best multiplayer blasts around. The new Onslaught mode has given a new dimension to the series, adding tactical awareness to the list of skills online shootists need to master. It even plays well offline, making UT2004 the definitive choice.
PUB Atari **DEV** Digital Extremes

PCZ ISSUE 138

BATTLEFIELD 1942
Not much in single-player, but online this Swedish gem has redefined the way online shooters work. Infantry, jeeps, tanks, planes, bombers, ships – the total WWII experience (minus the searing horror and psychological scarring for life).
PUB EA **DEV** Digital Illusions   **PCZ ISSUE 121**

JOINT OPERATIONS: TYPHOON RISING
150 players! Count 'em. Some say a world record (although PlanetSide begs to disagree), this is modern-day online warfare at its finest. Quality maps, plenty of vehicles and the best helicopters in the business – why, it even has useful mortars.
PUB NovaLogic **DEV** NovaLogic   **PCZ ISSUE 145**

BATTLEFIELD VIETNAM
Take BF1942, drop it into the '60s and bingo – the total Vietnam war experience. More claustrophobic than BF1942, which suits the jungle warfare period setting, this has a great '60s mood: all it needs is the late Brando and it'd be perfect.
PUB EA **DEV** DICE Canada   **PCZ ISSUE 141**

PLANETSIDE
Truly the mother of online battles, PlanetSide is a never-ending war among three armies and waged across several continents. Superb squad battles, stunning vehicles and atmospheric visuals make for a remarkably immersive experience.
PUB Ubisoft **DEV** Sony Online Entertainment   **PCZ ISSUE 131**

CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 4: SEASON 03/04

A fresh season is added to the CM4 canon, along with a variety of nips and tucks to smooth out the gameplay. The top-down match engine that enables you to watch how your players are performing still works like an absolute dream. The ongoing financial crises plaguing football means that playing the transfer market is a struggle, but the game is still as life-sappingly addictive as it ever was.
PUB Eidos **DEV** Sports Interactive

PCZ ISSUE 137

PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 3
Our guilty console secret has landed on the PC, and it's as good as we hoped. Better than FIFA in every conceivable way (bar the official licence of course), there is no greater footie experience available.
PUB Konami **DEV** Konami   **PCZ ISSUE 136**

VIRTUA TENNIS
Who would have believed that this console favourite would translate so well to the PC? Its control interface is supremely intuitive, while the AI is massively challenging. Best of all, though, are its truly sublime multiplayer options.
PUB Empire Interactive **DEV** Hitmaker/Strangelite   **PCZ ISSUE 114**

TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER 3
This third edition of Tony Hawk's classic skateboarding game is an absolute joy to play. It features enormous levels, more interaction than ever before and a totally kick-ass soundtrack.
PUB Activision **DEV** Neversoft Entertainment   **PCZ ISSUE 98**

TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 2004
Each Tiger game seems to be getting progressively easier, but this latest effort is eminently playable. With superb graphical touches, an immersive career mode and courses that feel 'alive', you'll find it difficult to put down.
PUB EA Sports **DEV** Headgate Studios   **PCZ ISSUE 135**

GRAND THEFT AUTO: VICE CITY

PS2 owners will finally stop gloating when they see Vice City's glorious PC incarnation. GTA3 was an incredible crim-sim; so incredible that it was hard to see how it could be improved, but the freedom and variety of its follow-up is blinding. Whether it's carrying out its remarkably inventive law-breaking missions or just shooting pedestrians, Vice City is about as close to gaming perfection as you can get.
PUB Rockstar Games **DEV** Rockstar North

PCZ ISSUE 131

GRAND THEFT AUTO III
It may have been overshadowed by its younger brother, but Grand Theft Auto III remains as awesome as it ever was. It's a great spin on both driving and shooting genres and you'll still love its noisy orgy of violence and speed.
PUB Rockstar Games **DEV** Rockstar North   **PCZ ISSUE 117**

TOCA RACE DRIVER 2
The most comprehensive driving game on the PC, TOCA 2 is a must-have if you're into motors. With 15 different motorsports to master, 52 tracks and rival drivers with good AI smarts, it's the best racer on the market.
PUB Codemasters **DEV** Codemasters   **PCZ ISSUE 142**

COLIN MCRAE RALLY 04
More of a tweak than an overhaul, the fourth McRae boasts immaculate handling and oodles of gameplay potential. With an excellent damage model and plentiful motor-fiddling opportunities, it's the best rally game around.
PUB Codemasters **DEV** Codemasters   **PCZ ISSUE 140**

JUICED
NEW ENTRY The growing car-modding genre gains another excellent racer in the form of Juiced, a game that outdoes NFS: Underground with some great graphics, impressive AI and a great sense of personalisation. We like.
PUB Acclaim **DEV** Juice Games   **PCZ ISSUE 147**

OPERATION FLASHPOINT GOLD

Now available with the tricky Red Hammer add-on, Flashpoint has become to tactical action what Half-Life was to shooters. Fight on foot or in tanks, fly planes or even direct an entire platoon, this game is total war – in your face and on a massive scale. The graphics are an acquired taste, but they convey a sense of wide-open warfare perfectly. It's the ultimate military simulation, with a stunning atmosphere and superb missions.
PUB Codemasters **DEV** Bohemia Interactive

PCZ ISSUE 104

HIDDEN & DANGEROUS 2
With a real Boy's Own-feel, a ninja-bastard difficulty rating and the same superb engine as Mafia, H&D 2 is one of the finest squad-based tactical shooters around. It's got a few bugs, but it's still an essential purchase.
PUB Gathering **DEV** Illusion Softworks   **PCZ ISSUE 136**
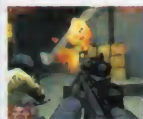
RAINBOW SIX: RAVEN SHIELD
All the style and presentation you would expect from a Tom Clancy game, from the realism of the weapons down to footprints in the snow. A tactical and atmospheric game that can be frustratingly tricky at times.
PUB Ubisoft **DEV** Ubisoft Montreal   **PCZ ISSUE 127**

FULL SPECTRUM WARRIOR
NEW ENTRY A remarkably innovative military simulator, FSW provides tense urban combat with you in a commanding role – despite feeling as if you're in the line of fire with your two fire-teams. It gets repetitive, but it's worth a look.
PUB THQ **DEV** Pandemic Studios   **PCZ ISSUE 147**

HIDDEN & DANGEROUS: DELUXE
This revamp of H&D removes all of the infamous bugs from the original, as well as including three extra campaigns. There's been a lot of work put into improving the graphics and modding fans will relish the new editor that ships with this edition.
PUB Take 2 **DEV** Illusion Softworks   **PCZ ISSUE 115**

DISC PAGES

DOUBLE-TROUBLE!

The *PC ZONE* DVD is now double-sided, which means you get twice as much content as before. If you can't find what you're looking for on the DVD, close the *PC ZONE* disc browser and turn the disc over.

TROUBLED TIMES

DISCWORLD

■ **WORDS & DISCS** Suzy Wallace

▲ A terrible thing's happened: I think I've run out of swear words. It's all thanks to having one of *those* months. You know, the ones when Murphy's Law seems to apply 25 hours a day for 30 whole days. Where you could quite possibly find out that you've won £2 million on the lottery, only to realise that you forgot to put your numbers on for the first time in ten years.

Working on the discs this month has felt like Beelzebub himself has sent his minions to rise against me. Power surges, dodgy hard drive connections, goddamn Macs, cancelled trains, reduced deadlines, huge demos not turning up and cursed DVD-burning software. You name it, they've all tried their best to hamper my progress. However, I've persevered and after working harder than a child in a sweatshop, I've got a fantastic disc line-up for you. If it weren't for the life-sapping effort it took to bring it to you, I'd be grinning like a Cheshire cat. I just haven't got the energy.

Thankfully, I've been able to vent my frustration against wrong-doers (rather than Will) with exclusive demos of the utterly fantastic *Medal of Honor: Pacific Assault* and the superbly frenetic *Call Of Duty: United Offensive*. With loads of other exclusives, along with a demo of the finest strategy game of the year so far, *Rome: Total War*, my work here is done. Now you must excuse me, I'm off to replenish my repertoire of expletives...

▼

CALL OF DUTY: UNITED OFFENSIVE

CD2/DVD Pub: Activision **Dev:** Gray Matter **Rev:** Issue 146, 87%

HAVE A MOMENT of peace and solitude before you play this. I recommend a cup of tea too, because this demo is fast-paced, breathless and quite, quite insane. Over the space of a level, you find yourself running screaming from tanks, zooming past Nazi convoys in a battered jeep, cowering in foxholes and running around with bazookas trying to stop the German advance. It's all the reasons we love *Call Of Duty* wrapped up in one snowy battlefield. Enjoy.

CHALLENGE SUZY!

ACHTUNG! Can you count how many scripted sequences there are in this level? The person that counts the most receives our pity and a free pass to the world outside his (or her) bedroom.
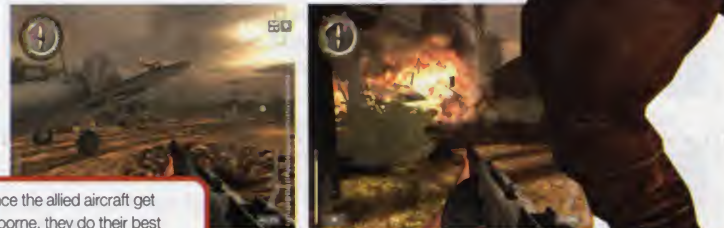
EXCLUSIVE

1. Once the allied aircraft get airborne, they do their best to help you out.

2. Explosions are looking better than ever, thanks to the enhanced graphics engine and awesome new particle system.

3. Trees are destroyable, so you can expect to see them falling like leaves. Timber!

4. Heavily armoured APCs drive into range before deploying Nazis for target practice.

5. It's good to see the dead cows making a re-appearance from the original *Call Of Duty* Burnville level.

6. Tanks are a real menace throughout the level, demolishing everything in their way and being uncannily accurate shots.

STOP ORDERING ME AROUND!

After your petrifying jeep ride, you'll find a man called Moody ordering you into all kinds of compromising situations. The future of WWII seems to rest in your hands...

1. SHOOT! Simple this: stand in a hole and kill as many men as you can. Enemies plough into the valley from the hills opposite, some of them in APCs, and it's up to you and your good buddies to keep the line and stop the Battle of the Bulge from getting any Bulgier. You seem to be the crack-shot of the squad, so protect your men at all costs.

2. RAT-A-TAT! Once you've rested your .30 cal on the ground, it's got a limited turning circle. This means that if you let incoming enemies past you, they're liable to leap into your foxhole and club you. Keep them suppressed and kill them at a suitable distance, and remember that you have to reload – unexpected ammo fiddling will be the death of you.

3. SNIPE! Take out the enemy machine-gunners on the opposite side of the valley with your trusty rifle. That way, your man Moody can run into harm's way and lay down smoke for the approaching bombers. Watch out for the straggling Nazis hanging around the tanks though – they could well get you while your attention is on the opposite hillside.
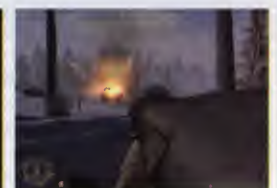
4. BAZOOKA! Three tanks, one bazooka and limited ammo. Think you're up for it soldier? The bazooka is surprisingly tricky to aim, so it's always a bit of a toss up as to whether you wait for them to get close or waste ammo from long range. Either way, let the bellies of the approaching metal beasts reach your men's emplacements and you're screwed.

IMPORTANT!

You can find all of the content here on the DVD, but we can't cram everything onto the two CDs. This is because we can get more than six times the content on our double-sided DVD, including a library of patches and utilities, along with DVD-video (that you can watch on your TV); bigger movies and more playable demos. Demos and movies are getting bigger all the time, and certain games are going to be released on DVD-only. If you still haven't upgraded to DVD, do it now. You can pick up a cheap drive for about £20, so there's no excuse. Unless you're a real pikey.

MEDAL OF HONOR: PACIFIC ASSAULT

CD1/DVD Pub: EA **Dev:** EALA

THE ORIGINAL *Medal Of Honor* took the FPS into the bleeding heart of WWII and we laid down at its feet in reverence. The sequel looks set to take a bayonet to the genre – and from what we've seen so far, we like it.

Check it our for yourself in this exclusive single-player level, set in the battle of Henderson Field, when the Japanese stormed the American base on Guadalcanal Island. You'll be beset on all sides from the word go by mortar attacks, gunfire and kamikaze soldiers who run at you screaming. Utilise the new squad commands by using the arrow keys to request your squad to move forward, fall back, lay covering fire or regroup.

CHALLENGE SUZY!
BANZAI! Play the Japanese at their own game. How many can you take out with the butt of your rifle?

THEY THINK IT'S ALL OVER...

Being part of a team is an essential part of warfare – and it's essential to use your assets wisely

A) You're letting rip on a charge of enemy soldiers when kamikaze nutter number 11 makes it to your position, and makes a kebab out of you with his bayonet. That's it – you're dead. Or are you?

B) Not quite. It's near-death, and with life swiftly exiting from your body, press the H key to shout for your medic – assuming he's still alive. Once done, just try to lie back, relax and enjoy the sounds of battle.

C) A few bandages and some morphine later, you can rejoin the battle and exact your revenge. Next time, take cover and try to call the medic before you go down.

ROME: TOTAL WAR

CD2/DVD Pub: Activision **Dev:** Creative Assembly
Reviewed: Issue 148, 93%

STRATEGY purists eschew the build-and-rush tactics of lesser games and worship at the temple of *Total War. Rome* is the latest incarnation, and this demo teaches you the basics with a tutorial mission that puts you in charge of a Roman legion, before throwing you headfirst into the carnage. The demo sees you in the Battle of Trebia, in which Hannibal, his ivory-tusked animal chums and the Carthaginian troops battle it out with the Romans. To battle!

PRIME POSITION

As Hannibal, you play with an outnumbered force – so you need to use (gasp) tactics to break your opponent and win the day. Ready to rumble?

A) It's a good idea to take out their General quickly. This severely reduces morale and causes nearby troops to lose their will to fight and rout, at which point you can cut down the cowardly dogs with your cavalry.

B) Remember to use your hidden cavalry to attack the Romans' flanks in a pincer movement. Timing is crucial: they have to arrive before the Romans overrun your forces, but after the two forces have engaged.

C) Use your elephants to cause havoc and disarray among their lines. This can also divide up their normally regimented troops and give your boys a chance to really get stuck in.

D) Make sure you keep your archers out of harm's way, where they can provide effective support to your infantry. They'll be easily cut down if you leave them undefended.

SILENT HILL 4: THE ROOM

Pub: Konami
Dev: Konami
Reviewed: Issue 148, 63%

IF DOOM 3 hasn't scared you enough, you can pit your nerves against the less visceral (but equally disturbing) *Silent Hill 4*.

The Room mixes the usual *Silent Hill* concoction of warped settings, unsettling audio and mutated monsters. Creepy.

SONIC HEROES

Pub: Sega
Dev: Sega

THE UNLIKELY trio of a blue hedgehog, a two-tailed fox and a red echidna, otherwise known as Sonic, Tails and Knuckles, bounce their way around your screen in this exclusive demo.

The trio work as a team, utilising Sonic's speed, Tails' ability to fly and Knuckle's brute strength to get to places other brightly coloured small mammals can't go. Go get dem rings.

NEOCRON 2: (TRIAL VERSION)

Pub: 10tacle Studios
Dev: Reakktor Media

PREFER your MMOGs to have a dark, gritty, futuristic feel? Then Neocron's the place for you.

Packed to bursting point with sleaze, crime and corruption, this erstwhile member of the online role-playing fraternity is about to kick things up a notch with this full-on sequel. Check it out with our free ten-day limited trial of the full client, along with thousands of your fellow hackers, crackers and cyberpunks. This is the full sequel to the popular sci-fi noir MMOG, so you don't need the original to play.

● **ALSO ON THE CD** *Nexus: The Jupiter Incident*, this month's FreePlay game (*Wild West Hero*), and a free trial of this month's Indie Zone game (*DeadEye*).

● **ALSO ON THE DVD** *Richard Burns Rally, Obscure: Learn About Fear, Mortyr II, Flatspace, Wik And The Fable Of Souls* and this month's Game That Changed The World, *Magic Carpet*.

MOVIES

PC ZONE

OUR FEATURE PRESENTATION...

HALF-LIFE 2

DVD ONLY This could be your last chance to feast your eyes on the stunning *Half-Life 2* before it gets released – and after reading our review (page 60), you know it's going to be something special...

ATMOSPHERE Feel the tension of the residents.

CROWBAR The *Half-Life* classic put to good use.

ZOMBIE TRAPS Zombie mincemeat coming right up.

MANIPULATOR Is there no end to its uses?

ALSO SHOWING...

SPLINTER CELL: CHAOS THEORY (CD2/DVD) – Following swiftly on the heels of *Pandora Tomorrow*, this represents the latest opportunity for Sam Fisher to don his goggles. The footage might be from the Xbox version, but you can have a look at the revamped graphics engine and the new moves Sam's been perfecting over the summer.
DON'T MISS – Sam utilising his new knife to slice through cloth and attack an enemy.

SID MEIER'S PIRATES! (CD2/DVD) – Arrrr, me hearties. Sid Meier's original swashbuckling experience from 1987 has been subject to a bit of spit and polish, and it's looking better than ever with plenty of opportunities to plunder and raid, don an eye-patch and wave a sword about. We can't wait! Full review and demo next issue.
DON'T MISS – Your attempts to 'shake your thang' being spurned.

DUNGEONS & DRAGONS ONLINE (CD2/DVD) – *Dungeons & Dragons* makes its online debut with this stunning-looking MMORPG. Featuring mouth-watering graphics and some nifty-looking real-time combat, we hope this is one MMORPG that doesn't get cancelled!
DON'T MISS – The oh-so-stunning water effects – they're fab.

ANARCHY ONLINE: ALIEN INVASION (CD2/DVD) – The longest running sci-fi MMORPG has just got better, as thousands of players put aside their differences to combat a new threat – aliens! With new monsters to fight, items to find and player-owned cities to build and run, the world of Rubi-ka is about to enter a whole new era.
DON'T MISS – The giant alien mothership as it rumbles over the city *Independence Day*-style.

● **ALSO ON THE DVD** *Call Of Duty: United Offensive Intro, Ghost Recon 2, Wings Of War, Snowblind, UTXMP*

EXTENDED PLAY

DOOM 3 MODS & MAPS

SEVEN MIGHT be an unlucky number for some, but not for you – this month we've got seven of the best *Doom 3* mods to play around with.
Bored of fighting on your own? Spawn some team-mates to fight alongside you with allied marine squad-mates, or create a few of those handy robot-dog-type-things with guard sentry. The *Flares* mod turns your grenades into essential light-giving beacons, plus you can add an enemy-detecting device to your plasma gun. What's more, you can also play the game in third-person, use some demonic powers and make the cyberdemons act more like they used to in *Doom* and *Doom 2*. And if you're bored of the layout, check out the maps – there's the fantastic Trite Breeding Facility for single-player and VIAVGA for multiplayer.

WARCRAFT: THE FROZEN THRONE MAPS

BLIZZARD is still making sure that the *Warcraft: The Frozen Throne* community is all smiles with these two new multiplayer maps. Sunrock Cove is a medium-sized map designed for four to six players, and the Excavation Site map is another medium-sized map suitable for four players.

DARK AGE OF CAMELOT: NEW FRONTIERS

IF KEIRA Knightley's whetted your appetite for all things King Arthur recently (and you happen to have a copy of *Dark Age Of Camelot: Trials Of Atlantis* or *Shrouded Isles*), check out the free *New Frontiers* expansion.
Focusing on Realm vs Realm combat, it adds more tactics, makes the battles more accessible and provides more awards for victory.

MOD DEVELOPMENT TOOLS

THIS MONTH'S discs are host to two mod tools: first up is the *Joint Ops* N.I.L.E. Beta Mission Editor. The funky initials stand for NovaLogic Interactive Level Editor, and the software enables you to edit and place objects in real-time, in 3D or 2D mode.
There's also the *Battlefield Vietnam* Mod Development Toolkit, which contains all of the tools you need to start creating your own mods for this outing of *Battlefield*.

● **ALSO ON THE CD**
Battlefield: Vietnam Debug, contents of this month's Community Chest (page 126)

● **ALSO ON THE DVD** *Bishoujo* movies, Mods of the Month (*The Specialist v2.1, Point Of Existence Beta v1, Anomaly, Battlefield: Pirates Beta v3.1, AirBuccaneers RC1*)

HELP!

CD trouble? Don't worry – phone our helpline on 08700 711482. The line is open weekdays between 9.30am and 5pm, and Saturday from 10am to 2pm, or email pc_zone@interchange.co.uk.
BEFORE YOU DIAL...
If you're calling the helpline:
■ If possible, have your PC operating and near the phone when you call.
■ If this is not possible, note down all relevant

information – ie system type, soundcard, RAM and so on, along with the nature of the fault.
■ Have a pen and paper to hand so you can jot down the relevant info.
MINIMUM SPECIFICATION
■ To run the software on these discs, you need at least a PIII 1GHz or equivalent, with a GeForce 3 64MB graphics card and 256MB RAM (512MB recommended for Windows XP users).

DISCLAIMER
■ This disc has been thoroughly tested at all stages of its production. However, it's always wise to use a virus checker on any software before running it.
■ Future Publishing Limited cannot accept responsibility for any loss, disruption or damage to your data or your computer system (including hardware) that may occur while using either the disc or programs and data on it.

GAMES THAT CHANGED THE WORLD 🔵 DVD

MAGIC CARPET

One was laid back and the other hyper, but together the two brains behind the legendary *Magic Carpet* produced a fantastic game, one of the last titles released by Bullfrog...

Ten years ago, these graphics were state of the art.

AN UNLIKELY duo, a ground-breaking engine and a bored experiment. That's *Magic Carpet's* story in a nutshell, a game that predominantly owes its existence to the brilliance of two men – neither of which, you'll be surprised to hear, was Peter Molyneux.

Though the gaming legend and founder of Bullfrog did play an integral role in the game's development, it was 3D engine programmer Glenn Corpes and young gameplay coder Sean Cooper – two men with diametrically opposite personalities and approaches to games development – who were ultimately responsible for creating the game. Even more unlikely, the finished product eventually paved the way for a new graphical era on the PC, and became the first game to fully showcase the capabilities of Intel's revolutionary Pentium processor.

As with most Bullfrog games, it all started with an engine. While designing levels for *Syndicate*, Glenn began work on an all-new 3D renderer. "One day

when I was playing around with this new renderer, I set all the colours to blue so that I had more shades to play with. Peter (Molyneux) strolled past and said, 'That game should be set under water'. So we started work on an underwater game called *Creation*, which ended up being in development for quite a long time in different forms. The last version was a submarine action game."

TUMBLIN' TEXTURES!

But then something happened that changed everything. Having only recently mastered the art of Gouraud Shading (an ancient graphical technique that enables colours to blend across a polygon, giving a rounded look to a surface), Glenn saw some screenshots of the recently released *Ultima Underworld*.

"I looked at them and thought, 'shit, it's using textures – how on earth do you do textures?' Then it occurred to me that textures use

Magic Carpet was packed full of weird and wonderful enemies.

"I had this engine that let you fly around a 3D landscape, but no idea what to do with it"

GLENN CORPES ENGINE DESIGNER, *MAGIC CARPET*

GAME Magic Carpet
DEVELOPER Bullfrog
PUBLISHER EA
RELEASED 1994
INFLUENCED *Magic Carpet*'s influence on other games is hard to pin down as there have been few or no direct copycats, though its combination of action and strategy can be seen as a precursor to the entire action/strategy genre. Also, games with deformable landscapes such as *Red Faction* can trace a circuitous line of influence back to *Magic Carpet*. However, the game's main influence was to push the graphical boundaries of the PC, and establish it once and for all as the most graphically impressive of all gaming formats.

Hope I'm not allergic to wasp stings.

Every level saw you up against at least one other carpet-riding opponent.

exactly the same programming maps as Gouraud Shading. So I mastered texture mapping and got it working in the *Creation* engine."

Seeing a world of fresh possibilities with these new-found programming techniques, Glenn's interest in *Creation* started to wane. "I just got bored with it," he reminisces. "I changed the engine to render images from above the ground again. Now I had this engine that let you fly around a 3D landscape. The problem was, I had no idea what to do with it. It looked like the kind of shots you see from travel programmes where low-flying helicopters fly over mountains and valleys.

"Then someone suggested that we should set it to Enya because it had this mystical look to it that didn't suit tanks or planes. So we did, and it just looked and felt right."

ONE DAY I'LL FLY AWAY
Enter Peter Molyneux and his young protégé Sean Cooper, who between them furbished Glenn's engine with a theme that paved the way for *Magic Carpet*. "Peter and I kept looking at Glenn's engine and wondered whether this was a project we should persevere with or not," says Sean. "After a while, we came up with an idea for a game involving an Aladdin-type character on a magic carpet who could cast spells."

And so Sean got to work, and in a mere two days had added the basic gameplay mechanics to Glenn's engine. "I programmed it in a weekend, and got some trees down and then put

multiplayer in," remembers Sean. "It kind of evolved from that into a magical action game." Development continued at breakneck speed, with Sean almost single-handedly turning around the entire game in seven months.

GOTTA HAVE A SYSTEM
Bullfrog's then PR manager (now at Lionhead), Cathy Campos, recalls both the speedy development and the unusual team dynamic created by Glenn and Sean's work practises. "It was absolutely incredible, done in something like six or seven months. We hit every deadline and had coverage in magazines pretty much every month from announcement to release," she recalls.

"Sean was a very clean coder and could always get things done very quickly. He and Glenn were the antithesis of each other. Sean always had this giant jar of coffee, some milk and a kettle in his cubicle. Every now and again while he was working on *Magic Carpet*, he'd walk out of the cubicle, bark out some orders at people and then go off for a coffee and a fag. He liked being under pressure, shouting, having his coffee and a fag and just doing the job with no mucking about. He thrived under pressure, but he wasn't nearly as good when he wasn't motivated," continues Cathy.

"Glenn was the complete opposite. He'd take his time and arse around the office, but what he came up with was always brilliant. Sean wanted the

> **DID YOU KNOW?**
> *Magic Carpet* is suspected of making a sneaky appearance in the Australian soap *Neighbours*. The game was never shown, only heard, but the distinctive sound effects were almost certainly from *Magic Carpet*.

pressure, while Glenn was very laid back. Yet somehow, the partnership worked really well."

Glenn Corpes still has fond memories of his relationship with Sean Cooper, a partnership that stretched back to 1990 when the two had worked on *Flood*. "He was only about 17 then, a tester and a real pain in the arse," recalls Glenn. "By the time *Magic Carpet* came along, he'd calmed down a bit."

"In the early days of *Flood*, we'd actually end up punching each other. The Bullfrog offices were so small that

we literally sat back to back. But by the time *Magic Carpet* came along, Bullfrog had a larger office and we sat next to each other – by then we were mates."

"Sean could turn ideas around really quickly. While we were testing the multiplayer game of *Magic Carpet*, someone would suggest an improvement, so Sean would quit out of the game and an hour later, he'd come back with a new version of the game and the feature would be there. Sean did 75 per cent of all of the coding that wasn't the graphics engine. Between us and another guy called Alex Trowers, we were able to turn the game around at a speed that doesn't happen anymore."

LOVE YOU MORE
Sean's memories of working with Glenn are equally glowing. "I'd been working at Bullfrog for seven years when I started working on *Magic Carpet* with Glenn – by that time we were really good friends. I was good at game programming, while he was good at the engine side of things. It created a competitive energy between the two of us," says Sean.

"I'd always suggest to Glenn how we could improve something in the engine

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THE GAME THAT NEVER WAS

HOW *MAGIC CARPET 3* VERY NEARLY WAS, AND COULD STILL BE

Believe it or not, *Magic Carpet 3* was all planned and ready shortly after Bullfrog was bought by EA, only to be put on the backburner in favour of the ill-fated *Indestructible*. "The plan was to set it a few hundred years into the future, but in the same world," explains engine designer Glenn Corpes. "There would have been all of these weird Jules Verne-like machines and vehicles in it, only more primitive. (Much like *Project Nomads*, incidentally.)

MC3: *Project Nomads*-alike. Nearly.

"The vehicles were going to be powered by a magic tamed by industry, and the game was going to revolve around getting the magic back to its original state, with the carpet being the ultimate vehicle. We tried to get the idea past EA's marketing people, and all they kept asking was why nobody was doing *Indestructible*. So we bowed to the pressure, and two years later *Indestructible* was canned."

However, Sean Cooper would love to have a crack at making another *Magic Carpet*. "I've been thinking about it for a while. There's a lot that still hasn't been done with magical creatures, but the problem is that, like *Prince Of Persia*, a new *Magic Carpet* game wouldn't be very relevant any more. If it was a guy with a baseball bat on a hover-board, then I think that'd have more appeal. People aren't interested in a magical world anymore unless it's something like *Lord Of The Rings*."

And what about Peter Molyneux? "There are other games that I'd rather do. My dearest wish is to have another go at *Populous*." Watch this space.

The enemy would try to destroy you and your minions.

in my very simplistic gameplay terms, because programming gameplay is more simple than programming an engine. Because of this uncomplicated approach, we were able to get a lot more out of the engine and do things Glenn wouldn't have thought of – and vice versa. He was always suggesting stuff to me that helped make the gameplay better. We were total opposites, yet we worked brilliantly together."

that to this day its deformable landscapes have been equalled. It was an amazing experience to be able to rip the landscape apart."

In light of this, it'd be fair to say that *Magic Carpet's* influence on PC games was more technological than gameplay-related, a fact Sean is happy to concede. "If this game changed the industry, then it's through the technology Glenn created," he says. "And he was doing

"There was a competitive energy between us – we were total opposites, yet we worked together brilliantly"

SEAN COOPER LEAD PROGRAMMER, *MAGIC CARPET*

With Glenn's new engine churning out some of the most stunning visuals ever seen at a then staggering 800-polygons-per-frame, and with Sean's lightning-fast programming providing the game's raw form, it was left to the steadying hand of Peter Molyneux to fine-tune the labours of this unlikely partnership. "Peter came back from E3 and he'd seen *Doom*, and he was really keen to distance *Magic Carpet* from it. So he came up with the idea of collecting mana balls," explains Glenn on Peter's involvement.

SUPER BALLS

It was an idea that transformed *Magic Carpet* from an action-shooter visual extravaganza into a game fortified with the kind of strategic backbone for which Bullfrog was renowned.

"I wanted to make it magical, so we came up with this simple game mechanic where you'd fly about on a magic carpet and have to collect mana balls, which appeared every time you shot enemies," says Peter.

"It's an idea I've nicked for *Fable*. The basic idea behind *Magic Carpet* was that each side would have a home castle and different spells you could use. Your ultimate goal was to collect mana balls, learn more spells and then destroy the enemy's castle. *Magic Carpet* had deformable landscapes, and I don't think

this sort of thing all the time. Every game Bullfrog did up till it was bought by EA, Glenn Corpes created the engine. That's where his passion was."

THE BEGINNING OF THE END

Sadly, *Magic Carpet* was one of the last games ever to be released by Bullfrog before EA gobbled it in 1995. It was also the last time that Sean and Glenn were to work together so closely on a project. By the time work started on the 1995 sequel *Magic Carpet 2: The*

Netherworlds, which used a modified version of Glenn's engine and allowed the action to go underground, Sean was working on *Hi-Octane*. His involvement in *MC2* had shifted from lead programmer to producer.

"Looking back at the game now," says Sean, "there are so many things that could have been done better. The missions got really boring after a while because it was just a case of defeating the opposition player. It needed much more mission variety and some bosses, really big magical creatures that you could go up against. It could also have done with having a living world that you could interact with. When you look back at your past games, they always seem inferior, no matter how good you thought they were at the time."

Glenn moved on too, eventually setting up his own company – the now defunct Lost Toys – that released *MoHo* and the entertaining sci-fi shooter *Battle Engine Aquila*, a game that bore more

than a passing resemblance to *Magic Carpet*. "*Magic Carpet* was very original, but it would have been nice if it'd been more like *Battle Engine Aquila*, which I think took the *Magic Carpet* concept to the next level. It had a whole world going on around you which you could interact with and influence, something that *Magic Carpet* lacked," muses Glenn.

PENTIUM INSIDE

Ten years after its release, *Magic Carpet* is seen by many as a title that truly raised the graphical bar, sounding a death knell for the Amiga and helping to justify the massive outlays that hardcore gamers had shelled out on their revolutionary Pentium 60s, 70s and 90s.

It may not have had a lasting influence in gameplay terms, but thanks to the efforts of two seemingly incompatible programmers, it helped the PC take a position of dominance in computer gaming that it hasn't relinquished since. [RG]

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THE LIONHEAD DIARIES

As the Diaries prepare for a break, *Mark Hill* notices a new kind of magic in the Lionhead air...

YOU CAN'T make revolutionary games without getting your hands dirty. And Lionhead is all about revolutions. Where other developers might shelve ideas as too difficult or risky, as too much work or as something best left for a sequel, here new concepts can sweep away months and even years of work in a hurricane of innovation. I know, I've seen it happen. It can be painful sometimes, but we have a duty to make games as good as they can possibly be.

So when Peter Molyneux finished work on *Fable* (Lionhead's blockbuster Xbox action RPG) and arrived at Black & White Studios to take charge of *Black & White 2*, Studio

Head Jonty Barnes was as apprehensive as he was excited. Changes were definitely in the air.

Bow before the God of Curry!

Molyneux and his merry men.

A FORCE OF NATURE
"Before Ron Millar came along," Jonty explains, "I was leading the design part-time, working with the team to evolve the scraps of direction from Peter into something exciting. Now suddenly we find ourselves in the enviable position of having both Ron Millar and Peter Molyneux working day to day on the game. But at the same time, I've worked with Peter for 15 years and I know how he can create huge tidal waves of destruction, though they are soon followed by Mother Nature making everything beautiful again."

Every single person on the project is very passionate about realising Peter's vision and turning it into an incredible game, and the real fear was that Peter would come along and say: "That's all very nice, but I've changed my mind. Throw it all out."

And to a certain extent, that has happened, concedes Jonty. "Very big changes have been made, but all for a very good reason. He and Ron had a moment of brilliance that has totally affected every single part of the game."

It was bound to happen. Get two legends of game design collaborating, and sparks are bound to fly. And fly they did.

SEEING THE LIGHT
There's a big rivalry between the two heavyweights when they play *BW2's* multiplayer (Peter says he wins because he's naturally gifted and could kick Ron's arse in any multiplayer game. Ron accuses him of being a cheating... well, you know), but when it comes to design, it's all about collaboration.

It was late into one night, as Ron sat in Peter's living room, the beer flowing freely and the air thick with concepts and ideas when it happened. Choose your favourite epiphanic cliché: lightning struck, the penny dropped, the lightbulb lit up above their heads with such force that it blew into a million tiny shards. Peter considers it nothing less than a moment of divine inspiration. "This was it," he says, "the thing that would turn *Black & White 2* from an amazing game into one of the most

incredible experiences ever created." For Ron, it was the idea that truly put the '2' into the title, taking it to a whole new level, more than just a mere sequel.

They arrived at the office the next morning bursting with excitement, messiahs in possession of the truth, ready to convert all non-believers. Jonty was an instant disciple.

COOL IS A SEVEN LETTER WORD
As Jonty candidly puts it, "When they told me their idea I got a warm feeling and just said: 'That's fucking cool'. It builds on the charm of the first *Black & White*, taking what was brilliant of the interactivity in that game and evolving it into a new generation. It affects every way in which the player interacts with the game. It means a lot of work, but it's going to make the experience massively more enjoyable. It's also completely original and unique and very Lionhead."

Peter says the concept can be summed up in one 7-letter word, which is... Well, I can't tell you that. Black & White Studios is a place of secrets and mysteries these days, and it would be sacrilege to reveal too much too soon.

We're taking a sojourn from these diaries for a while, but all will be revealed when we're back early next year. Trust me though, it'll be more than worth the wait. This isn't game development anymore. It's alchemy. It's magic. **PCZ**

What are you suggesting? I bet they haven't even seen *The Two Towers*...

"It was late night when it happened. Lightning struck, the penny dropped. Peter considers it nothing less than a moment of divine inspiration"

MARK HILL FICTION WRITER, LIONHEAD STUDIOS

We've set up a forum where you can tell us exactly what you want to read in forthcoming Lionhead Diaries. Vent your spleen at boards.bwgame.com

NEXT MONTH

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REVIEWS

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- Men Of Valor: Vietnam
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DO YOU NEED SOMEONE TO TALK TO?

THESE ARE DIFFICULT TIMES, MY FRIENDS...

Many games developers are experiencing feelings of distress or despair. It's nothing to be ashamed of – you're no different from hundreds of others around the world. You've seen *Half-Life 2*, you've experienced first-hand how beautiful, extraordinary and peerless the game is, and you realise that all your efforts have been for naught. Suddenly, updating the names for 'Franchise Extender 2005 Pro Edition' seems somehow... Lacking in purpose. Your whole life seems nothing more than a futile mockery, a cruel joke played out for the entertainment of Valve Software and its thousands – nay millions – of satisfied customers.

But despair not. There's someone who understands. Here at the *PC ZONE* Rehabilitation Institute For *Half-Life 2* Related Stress Disorders, our motto is: "Tell someone who cares." We believe a problem shared is a problem halved, and that's why we're here for you. You don't have to be a struggling FPS developer from an ex-Soviet state to call us. You don't have to feel low simply because your budget couldn't even stretch to a stand at ECTS. Whoever you are, wherever you are, call or email now...

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